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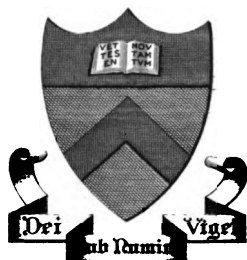
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FROM THE BEQUEST OF
DR. THEODORE W. HUNT '65

THE
SOLDIER OF FORTUNE.

VOL. III.

BY HENRY CURLING, ESQ.

Oh Heaven! that one might read the book of fate;
 Oh, if this were seen,
 The happiest youth,—viewing his progress through,
 What perils past, what crosses to ensue,—
 Would shut the book, and sit him down and die.

SHAKSPEERE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE
SOLDIER OF FORTUNE.

CHAPTER I.

I am amazed, methinks ; and lose my way
Among the thorns and dangers of this world.

Now happy he, whose cloak and cincture can
Hold out this tempest.

SHAKSPERE.

I HELD onwards, as well as I could guess, in the direction of a village I knew to be some ten miles off ; but when the dawn appeared, I found myself upon a part of the hills I had not, in my late wanderings ever before visited. A deep ravine was directly before me. The mist was so thick, that I could not make out distinctly whether another hill was beyond it, or the inundated plains. To my surprise, the well-known smell of burning peat saluted my nostrils ; yet,

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to all appearance, I was solitary upon the mountains ; up, up upon the summits, where the deer alone loved to rest, far from the habitations of man. I stepped upon a small heathery mound, from whence the peat-reek appeared to emanate, in order to peer over the declivity beyond it, and the roof giving way beneath my feet, I was instantly, as I conceived, precipitated at least half-a-dozen yards into the earth.

To my further astonishment, however, I found myself suddenly introduced from the solitude of the desert, to the society of my fellow-mortals. A turf fire was alight, and all the means and appliances at hand for the manufacture of whiskey. The still was at work. I had tumbled into a whiskey-bothie. The hardy smugglers were as much surprised at my unwonted appearance, as I was for the moment gratified at finding myself, instead of smothering in some kelpie's flow, in their warm and comfortable snuggery. They seized me rudely, almost before I could recover my feet or utter a sentence.

"Ta ga'ger!" said a great burly fellow, who held me firmly by the collar; "ta cursed ga'ger amang huz. Hugh! diel tak ye, mon; but ye're no blate to come amang us after yon fashion."

"God! but we ha grippit ye noo," said the fellow who had me on the other side. "Fat deil brought ye speering here for, ye dam'd loon. I thought the floods wad at least ha' keppit yer prying een at hame e'noo. May I be d—— but we'll raddle yer bones, now we ha' gotten a haud o' ye."

"Stay," said a third, bringing a lighted brand from the fire. "It's no just the gauger ava. That chield's frae the Castle. I'll swear it'll just be ane o' the sojer officers frae Bræmar. Fat diel are ye, mon? Just speak out at ance, Cot tam ye."

"Gentlemen," said I, "if you'll allow me to rise, I'll do my best. I'm neither gauger nor soldier-officer from Bræmar, but just an unlucky traveller, escaping from the washes; and who, in endeavouring to cross the mountains, unwarily fell into your infernal dwelling."

"It's a lie—a d—— lie!" said the first speaker. "Ye're frae Argarff or Midmar; and ye shall rue still-hunting this bout, any how. We ken'd the sojers were out the last week, but we thought the floods had gotten them, Cot tam them!"

I had heard, whilst at M'Tavish's cottage, that two gaugers had been caught and murdered by the smugglers, only a week or two

before ; and I also knew, that the detachment which had marched to the castle in Strathdon, had given them so much annoyance, that they had threatened to burn it with its whole garrison. I, therefore, made up my mind to a skinfull of broken bones at the least. How that might have turned out, I cannot say, but our controversy was abruptly brought to a close by the skirling sound of a bagpipe, which seemed to sound in the ravine below.

A narrow zig-zag path formed the approach to the entrance of the bothie, up the precipitous bank from this chasm, and three or four of the highlanders, after listening for a moment, rushed out, and peered over into the mist below. They quickly returned, and spoke rapidly to their comrades, in an unknown and harsh-sounding guttural, which I conceived to be the Gaelic for "the red-coats being upon them."

It was even so. The "unwearied and indefatigable," as they have been somewhere described, the flat-foots, were at hand. What can stop them? Through flood, through fire, they come ; nothing interferes with their discipline ; and here they were, amidst the storm, like slot hounds upon the track. Like Jack Cade's party, they had been out three days. They were still-hunting upon the mountains ; and

laudably employed, burning bothies, making libations of the full proof, and giving the malt to the streams.

At the announcement of the approach of the party, several of the whiskey brewers had attempted to escape, by gaining the summit of the declivity upon which the bothie was reared or excavated. But they found that the rear was guarded by a part of the same detachment who occupied the pass below. They returned, therefore, into their den, bending savage looks upon me as they hastily snatched up one or two long and antique-looking fowling-pieces, in order to make resistance against the on-coming foe.

I had seen from the first, that any attempt at escape would be likely to bring upon me certain destruction from one side or other. I therefore thought it best to remain perfectly quiet under the circumstances, and trust to the jade, Fortune, although she had already played me so many unlucky tricks.

I was not long kept in suspense. The clash and clatter of arms was heard without the bothie; and the well-known word of command to a military party, was shouted out in a somewhat theatrical tone and style, as some three or four armed sailor-looking men, headed by the gauger, rushed in at the doorway, followed by a

couple of king's-officers and a sergeant. I had seen by the demeanour of the smugglers, that they meant mischief, and I was not deceived.

"Ne'er heed the red-coats," shouted the fellow who seemed their leader, "shoot the cursed gauger and his men."

A short, rapid, and unequal combat instantly took place, the smugglers not having time to fire above two shots before they were overwhelmed in their close quarters and captured. The gauger, who had been wounded, however fired again; and the shot taking effect upon my poor person, entered the fleshy part of my shoulder.

I cannot say that I felt any great surprize when I found myself hit in this affray. Like Meg Merrilies, when she was shot by Dirk Hatterick in the cavern of Dernclugh, I thought it would come my way: accordingly, my only astonishment was, that I had not received the gauger's bullet through my brain, instead of through my shoulder. The wound was but trifling; and except that I felt my arm completely benumbed, and found myself bleeding, I should not have at first suspected that I was hurt.

"What manner of man is this?" said the officer, who had entered with the storming-

party, as he stepped up to me whilst the smugglers were being secured, handcuffed, and taken out ; " may I beg the favour of your name ? "

My presence in the bothie was soon explained, and the subaltern seemed delighted at making my acquaintance.

He was a short, slight, *distingué* looking youth, rather theatrical in his style and bearing ; and in everything he said and did, it seemed as though he was thinking more of playing a part upon the boards, in the false-exciting scene, than acting upon life's dull stage in this workaday world.

" You bleed, Sir," said he quickly, as he saw the crimson drops trickling from the sleeve of my coat ; " you have received a hurt in this squabble. Here, Sergeant Cameron, help this gentleman to ascend the path. I will look at your hurt, Sir, with my personal eye. We, luckily, are not altogether unskilled in Galenicals."

When, therefore, I emerged from the hut, I found the flat on the hill-top in possession of a party of a Highland regiment. They stood at ease, with ordered arms, shoulder to shoulder ; their tartans fluttering, and their accoutrements clattering in the furious blast ; whilst one or two smaller parties, were to be seen planted

upon the shelving rock of the ascent beneath, where they looked more like flocks of scarts or sea-gulls, than soldiers.

Altogether, what with the lone and desolate scene—the deep ravine and the swollen torrent which flowed over its face, the misty mountain-tops in the distance, dark-looking and vast, seeming as if they stretched away to the far end of the globe; the soldiers enranked upon the heath, their prisoners in a little knot before them, and the gauger and his assistants employed in setting fire to the bothie, now enveloped in a sheet of flame; the scene was quite romantic, and almost realized some of Sir Walter's descriptions.

The subaltern of the party was as good as his word; he carefully bandaged up my wound, before he attended to any thing else. He then introduced me to the captain of the Highlanders; and whilst the business in hand was being transacted, the detachment was ordered to pile arms; then in the warmth of the blazing bothie, we sat down to the enjoyment of breakfast.

During the meal, I had been somewhat struck with the appearance of the captain of this detachment. He was altogether one of the most

singular-looking and silent soldiers it had ever been my fate to fall in with. His subaltern, who appeared indeed the commanding-officer of the party, was altogether the creature of impulse. But the chief, on the contrary, seemed to require every now and then a flap with one of those bladders described by Baron Munchhausen in his Travels to the Moon, where the aristocrats of that curious bourne dropped into a sort of lethargy unless they were frequently boxed, in order to bring them to recollection and activity.

He was a square-built Highlander, with a remarkably good-tempered, though exceedingly Quixotic visage. Stooping much in figure, and wearing like Hudibras a goodly hump upon one shoulder; he had but one eye, and always was accommodated with spectacles on nose.

Although naturally a remarkably stout-built and strong man, hard toil, climate, war, and disease, had reduced him to the mere skeleton of the Hercules he had been in his youth. In short, he cut rather a queer figure beside the picturesquely clad company he ornamented. The casket, however, rude and rough it looked, contained a jewel both rare and priceless; for, notwithstanding the eccentricity of his look and manners, he bore a heart

and disposition, which would have done honour to the fairest form in nature.

He stood beside his men, as I said, with his shoulders above his head. His drawn sword carried hilt foremost under one arm, and a Scotch mull in his hand, from which he so continually fed his nose, that although the pockets of his coat were filled likewise with rappee, the feature seemed capable of soon exhausting his stock.

His accoutrements were as odd as his person, for being his own commanding officer whilst upon the hills with his company, the only thing he chose to exercise authority in, was in relieving himself from the annoyance of ever harnessing himself in his regimentals. Consequently, he was now out in virtual command of his men, in a full suit of tartans upon his body, being a large pocketed shooting jacket with waistcoat and continuation to match, and a huge tropical wide brimmed straw hat on his head.

"Captain M'Kilt," said the mercurial ensign, to his commandant, "I'm going to pile arms here : fall out, Sir."

The Captain glanced up from the turf beneath his feet, gave a snort and a whistle, something like the catcall heard from the gallery of a

theatre, took a goodly pinch from his mull, sheathed his sword, and obeyed the orders of the inferior in military grade.

“Singular man,” said he, as he turned about and regarded the youth who thus took upon himself the command. “Singular man, whew!” continued he, with another sharp whistle.—“Singular man. But devilish clever fellow. Whew! Subaltern of my company; command a brigade that chap.”

Indeed, what with snorting, whistling, snuffing, and admiring the versatility of his officer, this eccentric and easy commander seemed to be fully employed, and quite contented to have the trouble of command taken from his shoulders. With spectacles on nose, he watched his every movement, and awaited his cue, as to what was to be the next order, with the greatest apparent interest.

We had, as I said, sat ourselves down upon the heather, and were partaking of a slight refreshment, furnished forth from the haversack carried by the servant of Ensign Altamont de Montdidier. Whilst doing so, I learned from him the circumstances which had brought his party so opportunely to this spot. “We were ordered out,” said he, “some three days back, from Bræmar Castle, in order to make a

foray upon these mountains, and burn out the whiskey trade. 'Harry the wives of Greenlaws goods,' and give them light to set their hoods."

"For two days," continued he, "we followed the hunt, carrying fire and sword, over rock, glen, and mountain. Turk Gregory never did such deeds. Last night, however, 'as I upon advantage did remove,' half my powers were nearly devoured by the unexpected flood. These washes surrounded a party of the men, who were under my friend M'Kilt. M'Kilt I'm saying, you were nearly victimized by an element you abhor. Here's to ye in a fluid we have captured, more to your taste. Was-hael! M'Kilt. This is whiskey, mon brave; Sergeant Cameron, Sir, serve the men out an allowance of this liquor. The Captain orders it."

"As I was telling you," continued Ensign Altamont de Montdidier, "the Captain and myself, having divided our power, I took to the mountain tops, while he trod the flats below. If the man, as Goodman Delver expounds it, go to the water and drown himself, it is, will he nill he, he goes, mark you that; but if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself. Now, our friend

M'Kilt hath been, (according to his own account) since he first donned the red rag, nine times across the Atlantic. He hath suffered shipwreck three several times in the Indian Ocean, and was once cast away like Robinson Crusoe on an uninhabited island. Storm and siege, and all the extremities of war hath he endured, and even borne surgery bravely. Yet, was he last night all but drowned in a puddle here. He suffered himself to be surrounded by the waters of this flood and with his men was nearly swept away. I brought him off with his drum. No matter how, here he is. My service to you, M'Kilt.

“In short, Sir, we were completely washed out of Strathdon, and the shelties which carried our camp equipage drowned. We therefore have been fain to keep higher up in our attempt at reaching the Castle of Bræmar, should it yet remain to us. The cheil, who is endeavouring to guide us safely thereto, advertised us of this bothie, and we have, as you see, surprized, captured it, and made your acquaintance. M'Kilt, my excellent friend, I think time is up. Sergeant Bendochie, order the drum to beat up, and fall in. We have a long march before us, and a flooded country; if we are to find out Bræmar, we must find it out to-night. We

have, you see," continued he, "indeed, come to the end of our tether. There's no more corn in Egypt. Our wallets are now empty, so is the whiskey bottle."

The detachment, accordingly, quickly got under arms, and were told off; the rolling drum and the skirl of the pipes was carried far away on the rushing winds; and the Highlanders, looking amidst the majestic scenery in which they marched, a mere crawling handful of insects, wended their way towards the forest of Bræmar.

The march was not unattended with danger, the floods were terrific, many lives had been lost, and much property destroyed. Ensign Altamont was, however, a youth of extraordinary resources and perseverance. Baffled at one spot, he was only the more determined to achieve a passage at another. Montrose could not have done it better; and spite of the fury of the elements, he carried M'Kilt and his power without the loss of a single man, safe to Bræmar.

The castle of Bræmar, with its small turrets at the angles, resembling pepper-boxes, its loop-holed wall, and its windows which had been carefully secured in old times by stanchions of iron, (crossing each other athwart and end-

long, like the grates of a prison), and its Highland sentinels before the gates, was as like the castle of Darnlinvarach, in the legend of Montrose, as one pea is like unto another.

Since the rebellion of '45 (as far as I could learn) it had not been used for the reception of men of war, until the present detachment some few months before, was ordered there for the purpose of aiding the civil power in the prevention of illicit whiskey brewing. It was a vast, cold, tombstone-looking building, appearing, as you gazed upon it from the hills around, like some huge mausoleum erected in the pass. Its principal apartment was large; and having only the simple appointments of a small barrack-room, namely, two chairs and one table, placed in the midst before the huge cavernous chimney, it had a most chilly and comfortless appearance. Ensign Altamont de Montdidier had, however, partially rendered it more habitable, with the only means in his power; for he had pitched a tent in its centre, beneath whose protecting canvass the furious winds, which blew around the apartment, were not much more felt by the occupiers, than if they had tenanted a windmill.

It was in the night when we at length reached the castle. Jaded and spent with toil, the detachment was glad to gain its shelter,

since the fury of the elements amounted to something dreadful to encounter on the hills; whilst the terrific deluge, which was sweeping through the region, filled the minds of men with feelings of awe and dread. Every bridge between our stronghold and the sea had been either blown up, or washed into the roaring waters; and many thought the last day had arrived. Buildings were levelled, cottages carried away, enormous trees uprooted, cattle lost, and many poor peasants drowned in sight of their friends, who could render them no assistance. And still, the waters were on the increase.

Meanwhile Altamont, M'Kilt, and myself, sat ourselves before the roaring fire, in the vast apartment which had been appropriated as a mess-room in this Highland castle; and amidst the villanous compound of horrible sounds which whistled, shrieked, and bellowed in the air without, we held converse, smoked our havannahs, and quaffed potations of whiskey-toddy.

The scene was altogether new to me, and not unamusing. A huge log of pine, big enough for the yule log on a Christmas hearth in the olden time, blazed before us, giving a degree of comfort within; whilst all that was terrible sounded in the forest without.

The winds, indeed, sounded like the continuous rush of some mighty cataract; the waters of the foaming Dee formed a roaring second; the chimney piped and groaned in concert. Lamentations and strange screams of death were heard in the air; and the sentinels calling to each other "with dire yell," and naming the progress of the night every quarter of an hour, added to the discord.

Two more extraordinary beings than the companions I had thus fallen in with, it would have been difficult to have found, I should think. The one, all fire, spirit, and liveliness; the other, as slow, quizzical, and torpid.

Altamont, on doffing his regimentals, in order to take his ease after the march, had thrown on an elaborately embroidered and spangled tunic, which had served him to play the part of the haughty, gallant, gay Lothario, during some recent private theatricals in the last quarters they had come from; consequently he looked, as he sat imbibing his whiskey-punch beneath the ample chimney-piece, a sort of Sir Piercy Shafton. M'Kilt, on the contrary, with a red night-cap on his head, an old and long-skirted morning-gown upon his body, and spectacles on nose, looked more like the spectre of some withered alchemist of old, than a man

of this world. Two persons, indeed, more opposite in disposition, perhaps never were thrown together ; yet, strange to say, they felt a degree of friendship for each other, such as is seldom experienced amongst the gentlemen of the blade.

They were both as in their outward favour, likely to be misconceived as they were “ in the disposition they owed.” Altamont, by his every action, would have proclaimed himself a shallow and eccentric fop:—there was a levity in which it was his pleasure to indulge, which made him so slightly regarded, that what he said and did was neither heeded nor thought of but as the inconsiderate deed of a trifling person. With all this, however, there was an under-current. It seemed as if he was master of everything, knew everything, observed things at a glance, could pierce through the designs of others in a moment ; and was in fact an exceedingly clever fellow : and yet, although you lived under the same roof with him for a twelvemonth, unless he chose it you would have failed in finding him out. He made himself enemies wherever he went—that delighted him ; and yet he was every man’s friend at heart. He professed scorn to the world. “ Society,” he said, “ was poisonous, even in its smallest portions, most

carefully, most scrupulously, selected ;” and yet, when an actor in the gay and festive scene, it was delightful to be within the scope of his joyous influence. Conscious of his superiority over the generality of his fellow mortals, he was the last to presume upon it, or be dissatisfied with the companionship he happened to be thrown amongst, and he could have extracted amusement and instruction for the passing hour in the company of the veriest clodpole of the village.

M’Kilt again, although in his withered and wild attire, “ he scarce looked an inhabitant of the earth,” was a most estimable man, and in every thing a soldier and a gentleman. Beneath all his singularity, coldness, and quietude of manner, there was a soul of great magnitude ; and although it took much to arouse his Highland blood, when once chafed or insulted, nothing but blood would have washed out the wound.

After the fatigues of our march, and the storm we had encountered, the port we had reached seemed doubly pleasant. The Captain’s rear rank serving man, moreover performing the office of cook and waiter, with the celerity and quietude that a soldier servant, (and a soldier

servant alone (can or will give his attendance, having dressed us a mess of red deer venison, boiled a kettle of water, poured us out a fragrant cup of tea, poached us a round dozen of new laid eggs, and made a shake down for me beneath the tent in the centre of the apartment, we sat ourselves, as I said before, to the enjoyment of the hour—

The storm without might roar, and rustle ;
We did na mind the storm a whistle.

“ When you mentioned your name, my good Sir,” said Altamont, “ in yonder bothie, I was so taken up with matters appertaining to that action, that in truth I hardly marked it ; and during the troubles of our march hither, although we have become most excellent allies, we have had other things to think of, than inquiring into each others titles and armorial bearings.”

I knew enough of the world to suspect that the knowledge of my name and circumstances, would be more likely to poison the comfort of the party, than to add to our conviviality. I had began to forget my misfortunes in the enjoyment of the society of this eccentric pair ; the query, however, although it “ stopped the

career of laughter with a sigh, required an answer."

Altamont saw my confusion as I told it, and in an instant knew the circumstances of my recent trial. His superciliousness of manner immediately left him, and he redoubled his attention and kindness to me; whilst M'Kilt, who was also, in so much master of my story as the recent proceedings of the court martial had published to the world, in his awkward and ungainly manner, likewise overwhelmed me with civility. It was enough that I was unfortunate with these men: not place or greatness, or any power upon earth would have made them offer me the most trifling slight or affront when once they had become acquainted with my story.

"Fie, what a night is this!" said Altamont, rising, and walking to the window. "The genius of the storm rides on the posting winds; both current and ripple are dancing in light here. The castle is completely surrounded by water, M'Kilt, we're like a colony of beavers in their lodge: *ergo* we shall be drowned."

M'Kilt whistled, rose from his seat, and walked to the window. The moon gave a dubious light, and all around looked like the sea.

"Best rouse the men aloft," said he, "I'll call the drummer."

"To what end?" returned Altamont. "They cannot escape, we must await the event. Let *them* sleep whilst *we* watch. Yet stay, I will relieve the sentinels without the walls, lest they die like Romans upon their posts."

The castle was erected upon a green mound, around whose base towards the north, at ordinary times, the river Dee with gentle murmur was wont to glide. Now, however, the course of the Dee was lost sight of in the overwhelming torrent which swept through the entire pass, and encroaching to the very walls of the castle, seemed to threaten its foundation.

The accumulating tide in fact poured through the grated loopholes, where in former days the captive wept, filled the dungeons and lower regions of the building, and rising higher and higher every hour, at length the grey building, standing lone and spectral, looked like some sea-built tower amid the waters.

It was an anxious night. The detachment, quartered in the upper apartments of the building, slept soundly after their toilsome march. The court of guard was necessarily removed from within the outer walls of the building, and the guard, withdrawn up the winding

staircase, looked anxiously upon the dark waters reflecting the light they carried, as if from the bottom of a well.

The situation, indeed, of the soldiery, thus cut off from all intercourse and assistance, was not enviable; as independently of the chance of drowning, there was a probability that they might starve.

Altamont had ordered the guard to bear up all the provisions from below, as soon as he discovered the continued rise of the flood; and he now carefully watched and marked the progress of its encroachment. The sergeant of the guard, meanwhile, came in from time to time, with a huge branch of flaming pine in his hand, to report the progress of the water up the castle stairs inch by inch, just as a sailor heaves the lead at sea, and sings out its depth.

"Does it still mount, Sergeant?" said Altamont, as the former, flambeau in hand, stood upon the steps below, looking into the dark pool, like a man about to step into a cold bath.

"It does, Sir," returned the non-commissioned officer; "but it has taken half a minute more in getting up this last step than it has done in walking over the others."

"What's the hour, Sergeant, by your watch?" said the officer.

"Five, Sir," said the Sergeant.

"It's time the réveille sounded, then," said the officer; "and there it goes."

Accordingly the loud beat of an unbraced sheepskin, rattling and rolling a few feet above our heads, soon drummed in the ears of the sleeping soldiery; and the heavy tread of between fifty and sixty individuals, rushing from their beds, was quickly added to the clamour.

If the reader has never heard an infantry brass drum beaten, as a British drummer can and will beat it, and that too under the same roof with himself, accompanied by the screaming skirl of a Highland bagpipe, and the piercing squeal of the wry-necked fife, he can have no conception of the sound which now disturbed "the curtained sleep" of Captain M'Kilt's power. Nothing, indeed, as I said before, interferes with the discipline of the British soldier; and the duty goes forward amidst storm and wreck, as steadily as amidst fire and siege.

Here, accordingly, cooped up in a solitary tower, cabined, confined, and surrounded by the roaring waters, the business of the day commenced with the same regularity as though

nothing extraordinary was taking place. Indeed, it was not a little edifying to contemplate that system by which men could be kept in order, and made to sit down and break their fasts at the roll of the drum, put their barrack-rooms in trim, accoutre themselves, and fall in, en-ranked along the upper apartments of a building, whose foundation and ground-floor were inundated by an encroaching flood; their situation being like that of men wrecked upon a desert sand, who look to be washed off the next tide.

CHAPTER II.

Hitherto, this appears to be one of the most extraordinary families that ever man of quality marched into.

Sir Tunbelly, I shall now quit thy den ; but while I retain the use of my senses, I shall ever remember thou art—a dem'd horrid savage.

TRIP TO SCARBOROUGH.

UNDER the circumstances I have mentioned in the preceding chapter, was I first made acquainted with Captain M'Kilt, and his no less eccentric subaltern ; and such was my first night in the castle of Bræmar.

Luckily the waters, shortly after the *réveille* and turn out of the garrison, began to subside, though it was many days before we were able to set foot on the green sward upon which the building stood ; and long will it be before that flood is forgotten in the North. I spent some

weekswith my generous and kind-hearted friends, and then prepared to take leave of them. Altamont, now that the country was getting more passable, proposed to himself a short leave of absence, and invited me to accompany him on a visit he intended to make to the residence of a Scotch laird to whom he had letters of introduction. I endeavoured to excuse myself, as I felt diffident at making new acquaintances in my present situation. He, however, overruled my objections, and we agreed to undertake the expedition together.

As Rakehelly Hall was not above thirty miles from Bræmar, after taking leave of the excellent M'Kilt, we set forth with knapsacks on our backs, containing a change of clothing, early one morning, to reach it on foot.

The roads, in the direction we traversed, were in many places so completely destroyed by the recent floods, that they looked like deep trenches, scooped out by an invading army; whilst, on every side, was to be observed devastation and ruin amidst the slimy deposit of the subsiding tide.

We reached the woods of Rakehelly late at night; just, indeed, as the Laird and his friends were beginning the diversions and revels it was their humour to indulge in. The house was a

castellated mansion, apparently, as we looked at it from the distant hill, rearing its white turrets from the midst of a hanging forest of enormous pines; though in reality it stood in the midst of an open park of some extent, filled with deer.

It was one of those lovely spots, to look on which, necessarily takes the imagination of the gazer back to more romantic and stirring days. As the blue smoke ascended above the tops of the forest trees, and the turrets, silvered in the moonlight and embosomed in the massive wood, met our admiring gaze, we stopped to think upon some of the deeds of gallantry which the legendary lore of the neighbourhood attached to the family of the chieftain who owned the estate.

The sharp and continued report of fire-arms was distinctly heard as we stood upon the hill-top and contemplated the house.

"The muckle Laird of Rakehelly is an eccentric and half-crazy being, I have heard," said Altamont. "Indeed, I have been repeatedly warned against this visit we are making, as he is at times said to be almost dangerous in his liveliness of disposition. A sort of fellow who stands to no repairs. He turns night into day, too; rising with the owl, and going to bed with

the lark. Can he be indulging in the sports of the field, like the wild huntsman in Der Frieschutz? *N'importe*, we shall soon see."

Accordingly we descended the hills we were upon, and diving into the thick pine forest at its base, after a couple of miles, gained the park, ascended another mile of wood, and entered the opening in front of the house.

A mound was thrown up before the large bay-window of the parlour, which, although we saw a glare of light beyond, hindered us from observing the employment of the persons whose repeated shots were evidently proceeding from within the apartment.

Warned by one or two bullets whistling past our ears, we stopped, and making a *détour*, reached the stone steps which led to the fore door of the mansion. Here we were met by several keepers with torches in hand, who, on Altamont announcing his name, ushered him into the dining-room amidst the assembled party, who were just at that moment recreating themselves after breakfast in their own peculiar fashion.

I was considerably struck by the oddness of the scene. A long table, covered with the remains of this midnight breakfast, stood in the midst of the ample room, at which lounged

several of the guests. Others, were seated in the deep embrasure of the bay-window which looked out upon the park, and continually loaded and fired into the mound I have described. Each man blazing away at his own target, above and around which were suspended various lighted lanthorns.

It was, indeed, a curious party, but the host beat them all hollow both in appearance and style. He sat upon a raised seat at the head of his table, on which, as I said, the breakfast equipage still remained, mixed up with pistols, rifles, fowling-pieces, powder-flasks, bullets, and other matters appertaining. Wine there was, too, of every description, from sparkling hock to imperial tokay, together with spirits of all sorts, liqueurs, and a case of cigars standing on one side of the room, big as a seaman's chest.

The host was a short, thin, weasel-faced man, with pointed features, a red shock head of hair, a little cane-coloured beard, and a laughing, mischievous, restless eye. So fidgetty was he withal, that he could scarcely sit still for a moment, but kept darting about in his chair, and shifting his position, as if he was afflicted with St. Vitus's dance.

His conversation, which came by fits and starts, was accompanied by a solitary laugh,

which preceded and ended every thing he said and did, and was quite startling at times. For instance, if he darted suddenly forward and helped himself but to the "rough, tough leg of an old moor fowl," he always preluded the action by a joyous "ha!" And if he addressed any of the attendants or guests, he always preceded it with a loud "ho!"

It was his pleasure to be thought sometimes an Eastern sultan, sometimes a Roman emperor; on which occasions he was as magnificent in his entertainments as Mark Anthony himself. At others he professed himself a sort of high priest, and delighted in fancying his companions were a brotherhood of the same order with himself. When such ideas held him, he was not so hospitable. In fact, he was very mad at times, and exceedingly dangerous, when not in a pleasant temper.

His amusement was to help load the pistols with which his friends fired, and hold the stakes, and occasionally as he sat, to let fly at any object on the walls of the room that hit his fancy at the moment. Consequently the portraits of his ancestors and the various other paintings which adorned the apartment, were riddled with shot, and every part of the walls and ceiling filled with bullet marks, as closely as the walls of the

birth-place of Shakspeare, at Stratford-upon-Avon, is with the names of the pilgrims who have visited his shrine.

“Ho!” shouted the host, with a loud and startling effort, pointing his withering forefinger at Altamont the moment he entered. “Ho! who the deuce are you?”

“Mind what you are at here,” said Altamont aside to me, “or you’ll get an accidental bullet through your brain. The thing has happened before to-night. Most high, most mighty, and most puissant Cæsar,” he continued, doffing his bonnet, and walking up to the Laird, “I bear a sealed brief from your ally, Lord Cœur de Lion. A missive of introduction to your court here:—peruse the firman, Eccellenza.”

“Ha!” said the Laird, poisoning the pistol he had just loaded in his right hand, and biting the tip of the forefinger of his left, as his rolling eye glanced from Altamont to myself, in a sort of insane doubt as to what we really were, and what we really wanted in his hall of state; for having been twice put into confinement, he was extremely jealous of strangers mixing amongst his party, or entering his house, and the chances were, if he suspected us as inquisitors, he would be likely to give us the benefit of his weapon.

“Ha!” said he, after seizing the letter Altamont offered him, throwing it upon the table, and putting his elbow upon it, whilst he leaned forward and gazed intently from one to the other. “Lord Cœur de Lion,” said ye, “good. Fraternal friends and holy brothers,” he continued, calling to the sporting gentlemen assembled, and who were all apparently as mad as himself, “draw to the table here, and fill a chalice for the nonce. A welcome to my new friends here. Gentlemen, you’re both welcome in a loving cup, Here’s dirt and ashes, mortality, misery, and vicissitude to us all.”

After drinking this toast, the glasses were all dashed over head, and the pistollers returning to their vocation, the match, (which was for a large amount), proceeded; and blaze away over the bridge, was all the rage for the next two hours at least.

The assemblage were, as I said, for the most part men of habits as eccentric as the host himself, men who, in lending themselves to his humours during their visit at Inchkeithing, and following his insane and reckless style, in some sort followed the bent of their own inclinations. They occasionally called themselves the Infernals, and constituted a sort of club, which met once a

year at the Hall of Rakehelly ; the Laird whereof was perpetual head-sinner, chief devil, or master of the revels ; and it being a case of follow-my-leader whilst the meeting lasted, their freaks, and hare-brained deeds, were the astonishment of the whole country side. The club consisted of twenty members, all out-and-out devils, and there was no allowance of adding to their number ; neither could any persons be admitted to their society, except through the introduction of one of themselves. Indeed, they had played some rather queer and rough jokes upon one or two persons who had sought to mingle in their exclusive society.

About a dozen out-and-outs were at present at this gathering. Some of them were Scotchmen, one or two Irish, and some Englishmen. A hare-brained and reckless brotherhood, although gentlemanly in style and manner, as a matter of course—being all of them of the higher class of society ; only, perhaps, somewhat too boisterous, all of them having rather more brandy than brains in their heads at the present moment. Gamesters they were, because that is the varnish of a complete man of the world ; and philosophers they professed themselves, because they doffed the world aside, and bid it pass—taking no heed of time but by its loss.

Their substitution of the night for the day was the least of their eccentricities, that being frequently done by the fashionable world, during a London season. These worthies, however, professed to enjoy the sports of the field during Phoebe's reign, with more zest than they could whilst bright Phœbus glared upon their deeds. The Laird himself, who had, as I said, been twice confined in an asylum, had done so indeed for years; and the meeting of the society only lasting for six weeks, the members were content for that time to make the exchange in order to meet his taste.

At the present time then the sweepstakes having been decided, the party proceeded to follow their diversions according to the rules and regulations of their host. They were allowed one hour's rattling of the bones, stakes *ad libitum*, only they must be held by the Laird.

Next came, moon permitting, a horse-race, there being a regular race-course in the park. Then came the principal meal, served in the great hall at two o'clock in feudal style, the principal personages sitting according to their rank, and the retainers at a lower board. After this, otter-hunting, salmon-spearing, rabbit-shooting, together with whatever diversions suited the

weather and the season, were followed up until supper was served about day-break.

Such was the custom of the Friars of Inchkeithing. Their society lasted for about three years, at the end of which period, its members were for the most part *hors de combat*. Two out of the number were shot by members of the fraternity, dying the death of fat bucks upon the moonlit glade, double that number drank themselves to death, two more broke their necks at steeple-chase, and the remainder, on the death of their grand master, dissolved of their own accord, and became victims of "Cupid's but-shaft," married, and were consequently (like the rest) settled.

To return, however, to the present diversions, a horse-race was the first thing in rotation. The moon shone out brightly and the whole country around was silvered in her rays. The horses were excellent, and the stakes high, each man riding his own horse in his shirt and drawers, tied round the waist with a hay-band.

Then came a regatta, with flat bottomed boats, which the opponents were to row or propel in any way they possibly could up a rapid in the River Don, which ran through Inchkeithing park. One member had already been drowned in attempting the feat, and no

man had ever yet achieved it, simply because it was impossible. After this trial, in which those who made the effort, got a good ducking for their pains, the feast was served, and the fraternal friends quaffed their potations with a devotion worthy of the monks of old; these after shouting and singing like a regular crew of bacchanals, finished their orgies by ordering their steeds to the door for a sort of midnight parade and moonlight scour over the country. Accordingly, horses being provided for Altamont and myself, the whole party mounted and set forth on a headlong expedition, in which Mandeville, the Laird, being the leader, the devil for the hindmost was the order of the course.

They soon cleared the precincts of the park, scampered through the little hamlet, frightening the inhabitants from their sleep, and the whole village from its propriety by their shrieks and bacchanalian outcries. They then galloped through the pine forest beyond, and racing over the waste moorland, held onwards towards the hills. O'er rough and smooth they galloped on in wild career. Now their horses' hoofs struck fire from the beaten flint, as they clattered over some old half-paved road which, made in old times, led to a ruinous Tam O'Shanter-like

bridge, situate in the lonely pass, and long unused and unknown to all but the shepherd. Then again, dashing through the streamlet, like John Gilpin through the Wash at Edmonton, they continued the race. The ptarmigan whirled from under their horses' feet as they galloped across the heath, like a band of accursed Siouxs in the prairie, and the wild-fowl screamed as they floundered around through the moss, and gaining the lone mountain side, spurred furiously up the ascent.

After galloping along the hill tops, to some distance, they at length drew bridle, and leaping from their panting steeds, picketed them, and throwing themselves upon the heather beside a mountain rivulet, watched for the first streaks of dawn. Here they cooled their flasks in the streamlet, and refreshed themselves with a draught of full proof, as they lay along beside the burn; as soon as the dawn appeared, they once more mounted, formed in a line upon its ridge, and commenced a steeple-chase home again, in comparison with which, all the races of the sort that ever were run, were I should think but flat and stale.

By miracle, all the party in this instance at some time or other, during the next day, got safe home; but half their horses were

totally ruined. Two had their backs broken, and two more were like Fitzjames's steed, left amongst the crags as food for the Highland eagle.

Altamont and myself managed to reach Rakehelly Hall soon after Mandeville, who was first, and half-a-dozen of his companions, when we partook of supper at day-break; and having seen enough of their eccentricities, when the host retired to his couch to sleep off the fatigues of his midnight revel, we took our leave, and wended our way towards the south.

It was a lovely morning when we left Rakehelly House, and clearing the park, we took our way towards the main road, which we expected to find after holding the by-path we traversed for about six or seven miles. The broken track which we pursued possessed the highest charm for the traveller. In some places it was shadowed by huge oaks and birches, and in others, we passed through narrow defiles, overhung by frowning rocks on either hand. Then again we traversed the pebbly margin of a lovely lake, and after that, the long track was lost before us in an immeasurable looking wild, arrayed in heath of the darkest purple.

It was delightful to travel in the companion-

ship of so agreeable a companion as my new friend. We were in the land of romance ; and having been for some time stationed in the Highlands, he knew the neighbourhood well.

Nor rock nor glen we paced along,
But had its legend and its song.

When we reached the main road, our destinations necessarily lay in different directions. He was due at his detachment, and it would need his utmost speed of walking, if he meant to reach it before nightfall. My destination it would have been more difficult to decide upon at that moment, but I professed an urgent desire to reach the gude town of Aberdeen, some seventy miles southward from where we then were.

Altamont tried all his powers of persuasion to induce me to return with him and remain longer at Bræmar ; but I felt unwilling to do so, and determined to box the road, and take my chance towards the south. I felt a secret longing to be alone, and ponder upon my situation, and consider what was the best course for me to pursue. Relatives I had none that I knew much of, or cared for ; certainly, none who felt the most remote interest in my fate. My thoughts still harped, however, upon my father.

I felt a great desire to hear something of him, although I resolved to starve and die piecemeal, rather than ask assistance from him, after his unkind behaviour. England seemed to be, therefore, my most proper destination, and I resolved to reach it, as soon as I conveniently could. For the first time in my life, I felt the value of money; and the poor hundred pounds I carried in my pocket, I wisely considered my only earthly friend.

CHAPTER III.

What, what, what ? ill luck, ill luck ?

Why, thou loss upon loss ! The thief gone with so much, and so much to find the thief ; and no satisfaction, no revenge : nor no ill luck stirring, but what lights o' my shoulders.

SHAKSPERE.

" FAREWELL, then," said Altamont ; " since you will no longer sojourn pleasantly amongst the green retreats of Bræmar with us, and doff the world aside in the Highlands, I suppose we must part here. I shall, however, trust to meeting you in the great metropolis, when I am relieved from exile and detachment."

" It would give me more pleasure so to do," I returned, " than I shall say here, or you believe. But, indeed, I rather hope we may not do so. The best wish M'Gregor can give his friends, is that he may see them no more."

" Tush—tush !" returned Altamont. " You

look upon the dark side of things. If I was not chained down here by the articles of war, I would accompany you to England, look into your affairs for you, and spite of yourself set you right with your friends. You are a dreamer, a Jacques, a melancholy fellow. Why, man, in all you have told me, you have committed the sin of omission rather than commission. Had I been there!—but 'tis no matter. You want your grandmother to look after you. You're evidently not fit to go alone. *N'importe*: I shall be up in London soon, and I'll see you the instant I arrive, and never leave you till I have put you in a position to laugh at your enemies, and set you right with those you love."

"You will scarcely be able to accomplish that, I fear," I returned; "but only lose your own position in society in the attempt. It is one thing, Altamont, to befriend a man, and become his associate upon the misty mountain-tops, or within the walls of Bræmar; but it is another, my friend, to walk with him down St. James's Street, and cram him down the throats of your acquaintance in the great metropolis."

"And do you, then, class me amongst those insects of the season, those *figurantes* of the

ball-room, the grinning sycophants of the supper-hour, the *débris* of the season, those spiritless waterflies, who, without one attribute in nature to recommend them, gibbet themselves upon some person of rank and authority in the world, and, sunned in the eye of fashion, fear almost to walk upon their mother earth unadvisedly, lest they lose their place in the station they cling to? Dost think I fear the look of such cold shadows as these? No, my good fellow; I have said it, and I'll do the thing I promised. Be thou but guided by me, and I will bring you through your difficulties. Go according to your own headstrong ideas, and deeper ruin stares you in the face than that which you have achieved. Take my advice, return with me to Bræmar, write to your father instantly, and state your situation; by the time you get your answer, my leave of absence will have arrived. 'Yes, I'll be your friend, Laertes.' We will go across the Channel together, and carry dismay and confusion amongst these infidel Jews and turban'd Turks, that have so woefully bedevil'd your fortune and good name."

It was in vain Altamont endeavoured to persuade me to return with him. I felt even his

society irksome to me ; and promising to write my address in London, we parted.

Those who have never wandered upon the mountains in Scotland, and visited these lonely habitations, far out of the reach of the mere traveller, can have no idea of the solitude and beauty of their situation. The glen I had traversed for some miles, realized Scott's description of Glendear'd ; and when, on turning the base of the dark hill, the little habitation appeared far away in the distance before me, the streamlet running beneath the green hillock it was erected upon, with the mountains piled in awful grandeur all around, I almost expected to see Dame Glendinning herself come forward to welcome me.

The sun was setting as I reached the cottage, and I paused to observe the beauty of the lone and somewhat desolate spot in which it stood. It was precisely one of those out-of-the-way residences, where, in days of strife and fierce contention, a proscribed or outlawed chieftain, or knot of prick-eared whigs might have lain concealed from the pursuit of their savage foes. It had but barely escaped the destruction so many cottages thus situate had met with during the recent floods ; for the ascent it stood on was

in some parts completely undermined by the sweeping torrent, whilst many of the little cultivated patches, where the water had passed over them, were devastated and covered with torn-up heather, roots of trees, mud and slime.

Finding no one to greet me without, I passed through the little kail yard, and entered the cottage. The peat reek was welcome to my nostrils, as it spoke of rest and refreshment, and in truth I needed both after my somewhat toilsome walk. I found no one, however, within the cottage, but an elderly female, who was spinning and singing beside the turf fire. Being somewhat deaf, at first she did not recognise me, and I stopped to listen to her ditty ; it was old and plain, reminding me of the clown's song in "Twelfth Night," which,

The spinsters, and the knitters in the sun,
Did use to chaunt. 'Twas silly sooth,
And dallied with the innocence of love
Like the old age.

A child was sleeping in a sort of cradle by her side, and the chaunt was meant for its lullaby. The female was evidently of a great age ; and her features, as I caught a glimpse of them, did not at all partake of the characteristics

of the lower order of Scotchwomen. They were small and well formed. Her complexion was dark, and of that death-like hue we sometimes see in persons of great age, whose activity and vital powers are yet unimpaired, livid looking, and speckled all over like a toad's back. A sort of hood was drawn over her grey locks: and altogether a more hideous-looking hag it had never before been my fate to encounter. The verses she sang were evidently, as I said, some nursery rhymes of the old age,

Tarry woo, tarry woo,
Tarry woo, is all to spin;
Card it weel, card it weel,
Card it weel, ere ye begin.
When 'tis carded, row'n, and spun,
Then the work is haffins done;
But when woven, drest, and clean,
It may be cleading for a queen.*

As I advanced further into the interior, she glanced round and saw me, and jumping up with more alacrity than from her age I should have supposed her capable of, she immediately confronted me.

She was evidently not the gude wife of the

* Scott.

cottage, and I at first took her for one of those demented creatures, who are still to be found wandering on the Highlands, speering fortunes, and chaunting old ditties in the ingle neuk, for elemosynary scraps, and the night's lodging, which the simple cottagers would think it ill-luck to refuse them.

"Fat divil, do we want with meelitary men or guagers here," said she, quickly, as she stared into my face.

"Who told you, my good woman," said I, "that I was either the one or the other."

"Bræmar," said she, quickly. "Ye're frae Bræmer. I ken ye weel. Ye're ane of the officers. Ye've been watched to the Hall. How came ye here, in the deil's name? Follow me out, if ye're wise."

She glided from the cottage, as another female entered from an inner apartment. I immediately altered my intention of following her, and addressed myself to this person, who I rightly concluded was the wife of the proprietor of the place. She was a sulky looking, and ill-favoured individual; and to my request for some refreshment, after telling her whither I was bound, and the long walk I had had since morning, she deigned me no other answer than that of

placing bannocks, milk, and a lump of mouldy cheese before me.

"Your miles are long, my good Madam," said I, "and the country much cut up: I feel more fatigued than I could have imagined. Can you give me a night's lodging, in your pleasant cottage?"

"Na," said she, sulkily, "we've no that accommodation for the likes o' ye; best gang forrets."

"I *shall* do so, then, my good woman," said I, "and small thanks to ye for short courtesy."

At this moment, and as I was finishing my meal, the old daft boddie, returned, and resuming her seat, began to warble another of her ld ballads:

My cummer and I lay down to sleep,
With twa pint stoups at our bed feet.
And aye, when we wakened, we drank them dry,
What think ye o' my cummer and I?*

She evidently wished to draw my attention towards her; for as I turned, while the ill-favoured hostess looked another way, I observed her making secret signs for me to leave the cottage. Accordingly, somewhat struck with

* Scott.

her manner, although I had intended half an hour's rest, and (if I could have obtained accommodation), a night's lodging, I arose and offered to remunerate the crabbed landlady.

She, however, refused the coin I offered her, though something more civilly. "Hout na !" said she. "It was na worth the quarter o' that. I was quite welcome ; they did na tak siller frae travellers : they seldom came that way, and when they came, her's was no inn."

As I nodded to the weird sister, in quitting the cottage, she pointed significantly, with her choppy finger, in the direction I had just traversed, as if warning me to return. I, however, paid no attention to her actions, made no further inquiry, and although, for the first few paces I thought the circumstance rather singular, and the Highland hospitality I had received somewhat constrained, I shouldered my burthen, and like Christian in the "Pilgrim's Progress," went onwards on my way. The shades of evening were now descending fast, the hills were wrapped in deeper brown, and the breeze sighed along the glen I traversed in a melancholy and dreary style, that would have been quite delightful to a lover of the wild poetry of the bard Ossian.

As the glen was thus lonely, and I had still

some five miles before I came upon any other habitable spot, I plucked a stout stake from amongst some hurdles before I quitted the precincts of the little farm. The warning action of the old woman had for the moment struck me, and I felt that something in the shape of a weapon in hand would be both companionable and perhaps useful.

The path I traversed ran along the margin of the streamlet, turning and winding between the hills; and, to my surprize, as soon as I had wound my way around the base of the first hill beyond the cottage, I found my weird and withered friend had cut nearly across it, and was in waiting before me beside the burn.

"Did I no warn ye not to tak this road?" she said, as soon as I came up. "Did I not sign to ye no to gang further up the glen?"

"And wherefore not, my good woman?" said I.

"There's danger in your path," she returned.

"Who will injure me?" I inquired. "Robbery is almost unknown in your country; and for myself I fear nothing. I have injured no one; why should I?"

"You have eaten of the bread, and drank of

the cup of those you have injured but now," returned the beggar.

"Whose bread have I eaten, foolish woman," I inquired, "that you can allude to?"

"Yonder woman's," returned the hag, pointing back to the cottage. "Ye have imprisoned her husband and her son with yer cursed sogering; burned their bothies, and wasted the gude liquor in the streams. Ye have clean ruined them a'tegether."

"If you allude to the capture of some smugglers upon the hills, beyond Toumantoul, I have had as much to do with that as you have. I was captured amongst the lot."

"Are ye not frae Bræmar?" said she, impatiently; "and have ye not been away at that daft Mandeville's place there in Donside? Ye ken ye have, for I saw ye at Bræmar. Gang not down the glen," she continued; "I'se tell ye fairly, there's them been out speering for ye these twa days, that winna spare ye."

"Ridiculous!" said I; "what have I to do with the people here? I never burnt a bothie in all my life."

"A-weel, a-weel, ye mun do as ye like. Be ye ane of the garrison or not, ye're kenned and marked, and they winna be pleased to see ye

again where the still's at work, that's a'. Dinna say ye ha na been forewarned."

So saying, the old dame turned upon her heel, and returned towards the cottage.

I cannot say that I altogether relished this warning, when I came to reflect upon it as I pursued my way. It was not impossible that, from having been with Altamont and McKilt deer-shooting in the forest, I might have been recognized and identified as one of the officers. The path I pursued I knew was not many miles from the place where I had fallen in with the smugglers on the eventful morning of my meeting with McKilt and his party, and, according to the account of the old hag I had just left, the leader of the crew had dwelt in the cottage where I had stopped. I was not deceived. The moon had risen whilst I mended my pace, grasped my hedge-stake, and pondered over these matters. My way still lay along the side of the streamlet, which had now become much shallower and wider, its pebbly bottom not a foot from the surface. Both current and ripple were dancing in light. A rustic bridge had been here erected, but was now broken, nothing but the piles here and there remaining to tell of its sometime whereabouts.

Somewhere about a mile from these fragments, I had been directed by Altamont to bear off to the right ; and a mile further he told me would bring me to a small public-house, where I might obtain a bed for the night.

I began to congratulate myself upon the near termination of my journey, when, on casually turning my head, I found myself followed by three men, who, at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, were hastening along the path I had traversed. From their manner, I instantly knew they were in pursuit. They were running when I first saw them, but broke into a walk as soon as they saw me stop and regard them.

The only chance left me was to push on, and, actually running, I walked on as fast as I possibly could.

The rivulet again narrowed, and ran between precipitous banks, the path ascending on the right hand bank. As I hastened up it, a slight turn for the moment hid them from my view, and I was beginning to deliberate with myself whether there would be any degradation in trusting to my heels, three to one being great odds, when I found the path in front also occupied ; two men quietly stepping from the rocky ascent

which overhung it, and standing not twenty yards before me.

There was small time for deliberation, and a hundred years of thought would only have brought me to the conclusion I arrived at the moment I caught sight of them. Whether I escaped or not, my only chance was to charge the opposing force.

Grasping, therefore, my weapon, I walked quickly towards them. I had been forewarned, and I determined to hold no parley ; but, without waiting for their attack, dash upon them, and try to escape. There was indeed nothing else for it ; the precipitous banks being on one hand, and the rivulet, at this part both deep and rapid, on the other.

The demeanour of the two ruffians in my path was sufficient to advertise me, had I not suspected it, that they meant mischief. They stood doggedly before me, so that I could not possibly get past. Each man had a stout cudgel. I walked steadily on till I came within about six yards, and then, taking the heel of my hedge-stake into the palm of my right hand, and grasping it as a soldier holds his musket and fixed bayonet in my left, I sprung upon the fellow more immediately opposing me, and driving the

point into the pit of his stomach with considerable force, he was *hors de combat* before he could effectually strike a blow. Both, however, had levelled tremendous blows as I dashed at them, but my activity had thus been the means of my eluding their cudgels, and I instantly turned upon the remaining ruffian.

He was a sturdy fellow, and dealt his blows like an Irishman at a fair. My blood was however, now up, and I dashed at him, without regard to his strength or prowess, raining such a shower upon his head, and giving point with so much effect once or twice full in his teeth, that I was just upon the point of driving him backwards into the stream, when (in my fury having totally forgotten my enemies in the rear), I was felled to the earth by a heavy blow upon the back of my head, which, but for my hat, would have perhaps killed me upon the spot.

I was, however, only stunned for the moment, and, conscious that I was now completely in the power of my enemies, I had the sense to remain perfectly quiet whilst they ransacked my pockets, and possessed themselves of my pocket-book, containing nearly all I possessed in the world—my poor hundred pounds.

As soon as they found it, three out of the four arose from their stooping posture, and examined its contents.

"Curse the fellow!" said the man whose comrade I had floored, "he has fairly done for Murdoch I think; the poor chap's bleeding from the mouth and nose like a pig."

"We've fairly stunned the cheil, however," said another fellow, whose knee was upon my breast. "Best toss him into the burn before he comes to; he'll sink like a stane."

"Na, na, that winna do ava," returned the other; "that might tell tales of us. Draw yer knife, mon, across his weasand, and then we can tak the loon down to the bothie, and bury him."

I turned sick at the words. To die (as Eugene Aram says) is natural and necessary; but the manner of it is something which should be decent and manly. To be slaughtered thus like a calf by these butchers, was any thing but pleasant, and I resolved to demur, and resist the application of the knife to my carotid by every means in my power. Four to one was great odds, however. On my legs I could have been content to fight like Macbeth, "till from my bones the flesh was hacked," but to be held

down, like a pig upon a shutter, and feel the sharp knife cut through my windpipe, was horrible to contemplate.

Three of the fellows were still engaged hunting amongst the pockets of my book. The ripple of the stream sounded just beneath the bank I lay on, and a sudden thought struck through my brain.

The villain who mounted guard over me relaxed his hold for one moment, as he searched his pocket for the knife which was to cut my thread of life, and kill me like a calf. With a sudden and violent effort, I wrenched myself free from him, and rolling rapidly over before he recovered himself, in the next instant I dropped like a water-rat into the stream.

No shipwrecked mariner ever felt the grateful and cooling freshes of the desert, more welcome to his throat, than I felt the cold waters over my body as I plunged into this burn; and allowing myself to sink several feet, I struck out like an otter, for some distance, beneath the stream.

When I rose to the surface, I found my pursuers were as cunning as myself; they were quite awake to the habits of the animal I have mentioned, and knowing, that if I could swim,

I must soon rise for air, had run along with the current, and instantly saw me when I reached the surface. It was lucky for me that I was an expert swimmer, as I found I should have a hard struggle for it, if I meant to escape being murdered in mistake.

In my boyhood I had practised diving and swimming under water in the different streams situate near the Grange, and I was, therefore, quite at home in the element ; and as soon as I heard the shout which my pursuers gave from the bank, I again allowed myself to sink.

This time, however, I altered my game, and instead of swimming with the stream, I turned beneath the surface, and although I could not stem the swift current, like a trout or a salmon, I kept my head against it, and pulled with might and main, with a half turn, towards the further bank.

The half minute's breath I had taken, had not only shewed me that destruction awaited me from my foes, but I distinctly heard the roar of a torrent right a head, which, together with the rush of the waters which hurried me on, made me conjecture that there was in all probability, either a small cataract near, or some

rapids must be at hand. As a last resource, I therefore made for the opposite bank, and completely hidden in its dark overhanging shade, grasping a tuft with one hand, to keep my head above the water, thus out of the face of the current, lay perdue, like a North American savage, listening to the retreating footsteps of his foes.

I found, however, this was a situation I could not long endure. The cold was too great for one not bred in the woods and prairies, and I felt completely numbed. To add to my discomfiture, I found it impossible to land, the water being too deep, and nothing to obtain a grasp of on the bank sufficiently firm to haul myself up on dry land. My only chance, therefore, was to cross, and run the risk of capture. To deliberate, was to drown; I was becoming more benumbed and exhausted every instant, and letting go my precarious hold, I struck out as strongly as I was now able.

Luckily the rivulet, instead of being in deep pools, as on the side I had quitted, was just at this part gravelly and shelving, and I was enabled, with some little effort, at last to get footing upon dry land.

It is not often the case in the moral North, (in these latter days) that a traveller falls into an ambuscade, and is nearly victimized by such a relentless lot as I was endeavouring to escape from. Scotland is for the most part a quiet land; its remotest lakes, its thicket forests, its mountains and its glens, as safe and secure for the exploration of the stranger, as Hyde Park on a Sunday. In ould Ireland, indeed, it is more common for a red-coat to fall in with fellows who bear the gallows in their features, and murder in their right hands. It was, therefore, my peculiar luck to be thus hunted like a beast of prey, and it jumped I considered, with the evil fate my destiny always had in store for me.

There were, however, these peculiar features in the case, that these men had been much enraged by the powerful interference of the two detachments lying at Bræmar and Cor-garff, which had most completely ruined their trade; and, as they considered, in the most unwarrantable manner robbed them of their subsistence. They had, therefore, with the less remorse appropriated my purse, and sought to take revenge upon my person.

As soon as I reached the dry land, I cautiously

looked about me ; first I thought of climbing the craggy banks which overhung the path, and gaining the hill, attempt to reach Aberlochie, which I knew was not now very far from me.

As I stooped and listened, however, I caught sight of the lurid glare of a fire, reflected in the water, not many yards from me. I knew instantly that it proceeded from a whiskey bothie, which in my progress down the stream I had passed. With stealthy pace, and so quietly that the blind mole could scarcely have heard my footfall, I approached it, and cautiously looked in. It was empty, and I entered. There were several tattered garments lying about, and hastily stripping off my coat and waistcoat, I made free with one of the ragged great coats I found lying on the floor. This is the great secret in regard to saving oneself from taking cold, after becoming wet through either from rain or immersion in water ; namely to put on a dry garment over the wet one and immediately exercise the body.

Stepping to the door, I again listened, but no sound met my ear. The smugglers were in possession of the path before me, and which, unless I could have landed on the other side the stream, or consented to return the way

I came, was the only one I could take, the river being as I said on one side, and the steep craigs on the other.

I was fully resolved not to return; and to fight my way through my opponents, was rather too hazardous. The ruffians evidently thought I should make some effort to land, before I reached the falls. There were several shelving parts of the ascending rocks I had observed, as I cautiously approached the bothie. I resolved to chance concealment, by clambering up one of these, and lie perdue, till the smugglers returned; and not to lose time, I resolved myself to recall them.

Seizing, therefore, a large piece of glowing turf, I threw it into the dry thatch of the bothie, and set it on fire; it was a sort of retaliation which exceedingly pleased me. Then grasping a stout cudgel, which I found lying near, I ran several paces towards the falls, jumped up the ascent, and effectually concealed myself.

The stratagem answered; the bothie sent up a glowing blaze, the whiskey taking fire, and I lay in breathless expectation of the result.

The smugglers soon saw the beacon, hastened

back, passed the spot in which I lay concealed, and with horrible imprecations upon me, rushed onwards, supposing that I had fled the way I came.

After listening for a few minutes to their retiring footsteps, I seized the opportunity of escape, and leaping down the rocks, with might and main I fled.

Knowing that the lone inn or public, which Altamont had described to me, was in the highway which intersected the footpath I traversed, I quickly passed the salmon leap, in the falls; and now, not thinking my dignity at all compromised after this bad action, by taking to my heels, continued to speed onwards till I reached the high road.

After I had gained about half a mile further I stopped for a moment to look back, and listen if there was any sound of my pursuers. All, however, was silent; a dancing light shot up ever and anon in the direction of the burning bothie, and beyond that, far away in the distance, was King Richard's bright track yet visible upon the horizon, which "gives token of the goodly day to-morrow."

I was now warm and vigorous; the plunge into the river had, together with the excitement

consequent upon my adventure, carried off all my previous fatigue. I was once more solitary upon the moors; but my heart was light to what it had been upon former occasions. I had fought, and all but conquered, and it is wonderful upon what good terms a man feels with himself after doing his devoir like a true knight. Making, therefore, my cudgel play around my head, I hurried forward, and ~~before long~~ a twinkling light threw its beams from afar. Praying heaven that it might not be an "*ignis fatuus*," or a ball of wildfire," I made towards it with might and main, and in a few minutes more I had won the lone public-house.

After battering at the door with as much vigour as the Black Knight at the Hermitage of the Clerk of Copmanhurst, I succeeded in arousing the old people who tenanted it, and, after some difficulty, gained admittance.

It was but a poor place of refuge I found; for except some eggs, coarse cheese, and marvelously stale oaten cake, this house of entertainment was all unprovided with viands for the traveller's use. The reason was plain, it was seldom, if ever, visited. The landlord and his auld wife were superannuated, and past work. I, however, was glad of the slight shel-

ter it afforded; and making the outlets as secure as I could, in case my pursuers should discover my place of refuge, and possessing myself of an old rusty fowling-piece, which had apparently graced the walls for half a century, I felt myself tolerably secure, and determined to rest here till dawn, and then put on with all convenient speed.

Making, therefore, a good turf fire, I set myself down to such viands as my host put before me, and then threw myself back in my chair, and, between sleeping and waking, pondered over my situation. With my pocket-book and its contents, all my present store was gone, except some half a dozen shillings I carried in my waistcoat pocket, and my watch. I, therefore, made up my mind to push on for Aberdeen, as well for the purpose of giving information of the robbery to the police there, as also that I might find the few effects I had directed my servant to send from Fort George, and on which, trifling as they were, I was now to depend for support till I could get a supply.

I was now, indeed, in a different situation to any I had ever before been in. Hitherto I had only had those disagreeables to encounter incident to personages moving in the higher sphere of life.

Gold, the pale and common drudge "twixt man and man," I had never contemplated the want of; my means had always been ample for my wants, as far as subsistence went. There were circumstances, also, which had made application for money from my father's agent, extremely unpleasant to me; and the last time I had applied, I had been given to understand that my demands in future were not likely to be honoured.

The fact, therefore, of my becoming suddenly a penniless wanderer in the open world, was sufficiently startling, and stared me in the face, as if the poor hundred pounds I had just been robbed of, had been as inexhaustible as the cap of Fortunatus.

Thank heaven, however, that buoyancy of spirit which enabled me to surmount all the ills my particular person has been heir to, enabled me to rise above the present ill fortune.

"What am I," said I, "that I should repine at that which my own rashness of temper has brought upon me? Hitherto I have ranked myself above those with whom my lot has been cast on account of my gentility. I brought myself into difficulties with my comrades of the 145th, by holding them cheap, and estimating

myself beyond price, *ergo*, I have been humbled, fallen (I fear) like Lucifer, never to rise again. Away, then, with my gentility," said I, "there is no sign left to shew the world I am a gentleman." My name, which had been a knightly and a noble one since my fathers helped to conquer for the Normans, I determined to part with. Through me it had suffered no dishonour; but I seemed now unworthy to bear it. The station in life to which it had pleased heaven to call me, I was unable to fill. Be it so, nature hath given me talents, I will use them. The only difficulty was to know what I was most clever in. Having been brought up to no profession, the chances were, that I was unfit for any. All the accomplishments I possessed were utterly useless—not one of them would earn me a shilling. "What, in the name of all the gods at once, is to become of me?" said I. Divested by a multitude of rash acts, of home, friends, and country, unless I could manage to strike out some means of present subsistence, I must either rob or starve.

"Poor is the friendless master of a world," saith the poet. I was not master of a world, but I was both poor and friendless. At least, it was my pleasure to revel in the idea, that

such was the fact. Mine was a case of pride apeing humility ; and I cast from my mind as offensive the idea of applying to any one for assistance in my present strait. Altamont would have flown to me had I but hinted my mishap. So would M'Kilt. I was not without friends, then ; but how could I, however, borrow without the slightest idea when I was likely to be able to repay them. Mrs. Allworthy, too, good soul, if alive, would I was sure have received me into her house, and advised with me as to my future career. But, no : I resolved to work for bread, rather than be under obligation to living mortal. "No," said I, rising and striding across the floor of the little cabin I was cribbed in ; "the world hath used me scurvily. I'll seek for favours from none. To receive them would be bad enough ; but to be refused, ye gods ! I know not whether the thought most frightens, disgusts, or affronts me. Better beg my food," I said aloud, throwing myself into an Orlando Furioso attitude, which caused the old host to poke his head from his berth, and stare with affright, thinking he had a daft body for his guest ;

Or, with a base and boisterous sword, enforce
A thievish living on the common road.

“Ha! a thought strikes me,” I continued; “by this penniless pocket, ’twere not the worst way. I’ll turn actor for the nonce; and fret my hour upon the stage. As honest Bardolph says, ‘It is a life I do desire; I will thrive.’”

I think it is my Lord Burlington who, in one of his letters to Pope, remarks upon the amusement afforded him in observing the disparity of men from themselves, even in a week’s progress of time. The desultory leaping and catching of new motions, new modes, new measures; and that strange spirit of life (I use his own words) with which men broken and disappointed resume their hopes, their solicitations, their ambitions.

It is even so: seated in a mud-walled cottage, and almost penniless, I already began in anticipation to fancy myself the observed of all observers; a very Roscius in Rome. The scenic hour had always been to me one of peculiar enchantment. The veriest strollers that ever ranted in a booth, I had always envied their hour before the footlights; the idea, therefore, was the more pleasant to me, as it promised to afford me a visible means of existence, and jumped with my humour. Oh! Shakspeare, I fear me you have much to answer for. How many a gawky youth, who might have done his

country service at the plough-tail, have thy words of fire sent to rave, recite, and throw his awkward limbs about, and be hissed into madness in a country barn.

As soon as dawn appeared, I prepared to leave the little inn. The hostess crept from out of her berth, and prepared me a mess which she called sowans; and the old hen having deposited an egg, I made a tolerable breakfast. After remunerating the old dame, I grasped my cudgel, and wended my way.

Luckily for me, my foes had spent so much time in seeking for me in the neighbourhood of the farm in the glen, that they thought it unsafe longer to remain near the scene of their robbery; they therefore made the best of their way to Glasgow, as I afterwards heard; whilst I, unmolested, wended on towards Aberdeen, which place I reached late the next night.

CHAPTER IV.

A poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more.

How will this grieve you
When you shall come to clearer knowledge, that
You thus have published me? Gentle, my Lord,
You scarce can right me thoroughly, then, to say
You did mistake.

SHAKSPERE.

WHEN I reached Aberdeen, I inquired my way to M'Cray's hotel, where I had ordered my late rear-rank servant, of the 145th, to forward my baggage to, and which I was glad enough to find the faithful fellow had performed. I forthwith located myself there; and for the first time for many nights enjoyed a comfortable bed and refreshing sleep.

It was nigh noon the next day, before I made my appearance in all the comforts of clean linen and my best suit of mufti. As I break-

fasted, I was surprised to find what a gay place this northern town was. The fashionables were just then promenading the High Street, which was quite filled with elegantly-dressed and lovely females, attended by beaux and cavaliers as smart as themselves.

I had always thought the Scotch were grave and staid folks, both young and old, with an eye to the main chance, and as rigid in manner and conversation as a community of quakers ; the old folks, like Douce Davie Deans—the young as serious as his daughter Jennie. Here, however, the nymphs and swains seemed as fresh and fair, and full of spirit, as the month of May.

As I looked from my window upon the gay scene, the depôt of the regiment stationed there came sweeping down the street, with their drums and trumpets sounding my hopes. The sight gave me a pang, as I reflected that all my hopes in that profession were gone for ever.

To my surprise, I saw Altamont de Montdidier coming full swing down the street. He seemed to know every party he met, and had something to say to each, whether he knew them or not.

“Ha ! my Lord Provost,” said he, to a most

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curious-looking elderly gentleman, dressed something in the style of Nicol Jarvie a venerable functionary wearing a Ramilies wig, which covered his whole forehead in front; a laced neckcloth, and carrying a most respectable cane behind his back. "Ha! my Lord Provost, what sort of rule do you keep here in this shire of yours? I have been stopped, robbed, and well nigh murdered amongst the fastnesses beyond Lochintoidar."

"Heaven be here, man," said the Provost; "ye dinna mean that; hout, but it's clear again common sense, yon. Ye're joking. Ye made the giants, and then ye killed them, eh?"

"Not I," said Altamont; "like Ensign Pattypan, I should have been stopped, robbed, and stripped, but that I luckily had fire-arms with me. I'm uneasy about a friend, from whom I parted, the same morning, and I galloped into town from Toumantoul, to ascertain if he has arrived.

"Yer a gude youth, and an extraordinary," said the Provost; "I can hear ye well spoken o' in every house I call at. 'Gad, but yer a monstrous favourite of Mistress Macmullain's. What for no come away an' dine wi' us at five, man?"

"It cannot be, Baillie; I've engaged myself

this evening to Ducrow. He professes, in his bill, to ride five horses at once. I have betted that I ride ten. All Aberdeen is coming to see it, and you must bring Mrs. Macmullain also."

"I'll surely do that. But ye're a queer chiel! something foolish in these vain matters, but a monstrous favourite o' Mistress Macmullain. Come awa, and tak yer brose wi' huz to-morrow."

"It cannot be, Baillie," said Altamont. "To-morrow I am engaged, also, at the theatre. I am going into the oven with Monsieur Chau-bert the fire-eater, and his leg of mutton."

"Heaven be here! but ye're surely no blate! Yer o'er fond o' these fierce vanities," returned the Baillie, taking a huge pinch of rappee; "and here comes the bonniest lass in the hale kintra side," he continued, bowing as a party of ladies were about to pass; "the Laird o' Aberbirkfeldy's dauchter."

"Did I not dance with you in Brabant once?" said Altamont, addressing himself to one of the young ladies, a remarkably handsome and elegant creature.

"Now then," I thought, "I shall hear the northern accent rained upon this impudent

youth's head. I shall certainly now hear the Fats yer will of Lieutenant Bullyman."

I was mistaken ; the lady answered quite to the purpose, and in the same language too.

"Did I not dance with *you* at Brabant once?" she said.

"I know you did."

"How needless was it then to ask the question."

Altamont now joined the ladies in the promenade, and was quickly out of sight.

It is not necessary to pursue any further my story during the short time I remained in the north. In fine, the good Altamont, who had indeed returned post-haste from his detachment in the desire of finding me at Aberdeen, where he hoped he might still have "the tongue of persuasion," and myself the "ears of profiting," totally failed in dissuading me from my resolution of adopting the stage for a profession, and trying my powers in the company of the first strollers with whom I should fall in. He was, as I said, himself a lover of the drama, fond of amateur performances and one of the most finished actors perhaps upon the stage. He therefore could better forgive the propensity I felt to try my hand upon the boards, although his good sense told

him that it could only lead to ruin, being adopted as much out of the spirit of opposition as any thing else.

I therefore converted the few articles I possessed of any value into cash ; and left in Altamont's hands the task of endeavouring to discover the thieves who had possessed themselves of my pocket-book and its contents. Then in order to be quite in character, I put what things I wanted by way of change into a bundle, sounded the very base string of humility by assuming the name of Mr. Peter Snooks, and started on a promenade towards England.

My journey southward was pleasant enough. I lingered and loitered, like any other dreamer, for days together beside the mouldering tower, the battered keep, and the ruined abbey. I even sometimes passed the night under the trees of the forest ; and whilst thus sequestered and alone, amused myself in melancholy musings upon the by-gone days, my own blighted hopes, and all the mishaps that had happened to me. I had still some few pounds in my pockets ; my wants were few, and I turned my steps from the direct route wherever fancy led me. A draught from the running brook served me in place of more hot and rebellious liquors ; like Boniface's ale, I merely fancied it burgundy, and it was worth

ten shillings a quart; and whilst the fresh spring bubbled beside my napkin, and the free birds twittering and chirping, hopped from bough to bough to claim the crumbs I left for perquisites, I eat my solitary meal of bread and cheese thus "under the shade of melancholy boughs," or in any of the cottages I happened to pass in my travels.

Thus I visited many of the places of interest mentioned in Scott's pages, and whilst his magic spell was upon me, and I wandered amidst the hills and valleys he has immortalized, I forgot for a time the cares of my every day existence. It seemed indeed indifferent to me how I passed my time, or whither I bent my steps, provided I did but pass it in a sort of oblivion of all pertaining to self. Totally without prospect, there seemed nothing left to me but to get through existence—a dreary waste of years.

Thus I wandered through Perthshire, saw the mist upon the mountain, and heard the night-bird shriek in the country of the McGregors, wandered over the fields of Bannockburn and Flodden, and wended my way through Ettrick and Teviotdale, by

Tweed's fair river, broad and deep,
And Cheviot's mountains lone.

I then passed over the wilds of Cumberland, and once more approached the more fertile country of Yorkshire.

As I was now fairly quit of my military employment, I hoped never even to see a soldier again. Indeed, the mere falling in with a recruiting party, in a small town I passed through, had brought back so many unpleasant reminiscences, that I generally avoided the most frequented road, and travelled through by-ways, and shadowy lanes, having no fixed destination, but still progressed onwards in a tortuous progress, with the great metropolis in my mind's eye as a halting-place, but with no desire to reach it.

My stock of cash, however, now ran low, and I could not live so cheaply as I managed to do in the north. Moreover, although I might sometimes throw myself upon the greensward before some cottage porch, and play with the little urchins where I purchased my homely meal, yet in England, as I was compelled generally to seek my bed at the roadside inn, my purse had diminished to the lowest ebb.

One evening as I entered a little village in Derbyshire, I perceived I man fishing. I was always fond of the sport, and the sight of a brother of the angle was sure to interest me ;

accordingly I stopped and entered into conversation with him. I found he was the manager of a company of strollers, who were travelling towards Derby. They had halted for the night, he told me, in the village; and he had been to the Great House, the residence of Squire Wildhawk, who had given them a bespeak. They were to play in the Squire's drawing-room, before a large company of his friends. The Squire had bespoke the play himself; he was a great lover of the immortal bard, and he desired them to play "As you like it."

"You know, Sir," said the manager, "that Jaques was a character that used to make John Philip Kemble tremble; my heavy business gentleman is just now extremely unwell, or between ourselves, he affects it: he lies crafty sick, to-day, at the Checquers, and I must either play the part myself, or we must leave Jaques out of the piece. I am by no means up in the part, and am slow of study, and knowing not what to do, in pure melancholy and troubled brain, I have taken my rod, and come to fish."

"Make yourself quite easy, Sir, on that subject," I said, "I'll play Jaques for you."

"My dear Sir, you're surely joking," said the manager, "you're not of the profession."

"I am not," I replied, "but I'll play the character, notwithstanding."

"We play, man, this evening," returned the stroller, "in a couple of hours' time. The rehearsal's over."

"I want no rehearsal," said I, "I know every part in the play."

"This is fortunate, indeed," said the manager. "Now, Mr. Arden, I have ye; 'no more that Thane of Cawdor, that Mr. Buttenshaw, shall deceive our bosom's intent;' I discharge Mr. Buttenshaw to-morrow. A specimen, Sir, a specimen; "all the world's a stage,"—speak that speech, I pray you!"

I gave it him, with good emphasis and discretion.

"My good Sir," said he, seizing my hand, "you've been joking with me. You are from London; you belong to the profession, and you ask thirty pounds a-week."

I answered him in the negative; and added, I meant to look for an engagement.

"If my poor company will not disgrace your powers," said he, "I shall be happy to engage you."

In short, I enrolled myself in his *corps dramatique*, and made my *debut* that night in the drawing-room of Wildhawk Hall: I

played Jaques before the Squire and his party. The whole affair was not a little curious. Squire Wildhawk was a specimen of the old country squire, long since extinct, a regular roaring, blustering, drinking cavalier. He was a humourist, a would be wit; and, moreover, a great lover of the drama, considering himself no slight judge of acting. We played as they used to do in the olden time, without the aid of scenery or decorations in the dining-room, a vast oak-panelled apartment; the audience passing their remarks upon us as we appeared, and criticising us with as little mercy, as Theseus and his court criticised Bully Bottom, Peter Quince, Snout, Starveling, and Flute.

The Squire was an invalid; a fine, portly, fox-hunting, drinking, gouty, old English gentleman; and being unable to walk, he had his great chair wheeled into the room, and a table, with his punch-bowl, his port and his claret, set before him. The lights were arranged across the room at his feet: his family and guests flanked him on either side, and with his pipe in his mouth, he prepared to enjoy his favourite play.

The audience was entirely made up from the party beneath his roof, or belonging to the place.

There were his two Hebe daughters, with their intended swains, several ladies and gentlemen staying in the house, and every servant, from the butler to the greasy kitchen wench.

It was the old gentleman's peculiar delight to interrupt everything that was going forward. If he heard a line misquoted, he stopped the performance, or else called upon his party to hiss that fellow off. If he heard anything that particularly pleased him, he interrupted the scene with as little remorse, in order to drink to the speaker, and commend him for his elocution.

"A prologue, a prologue; hang me but I'll have a prologue. To't," he began, as soon as the curtain drew up, and Orlando and Adam appeared, and were about to commence. "Manager, I say, manager, d—n thee, where hast thee hid thyself?"

"I beg your pardon, Sir," said the manager, running in, his points only half trussed for the senior duke. "I beg your pardon, but there is no prologue to this piece."

"There is not, chops, ay?" said the Squire; "that's all you know about the matter. I'll have a prologue notwithstanding, or I'll hang the whole lot of ye. Here's a pretty fellow, my masters all," he said, turning to the company.

“Can’t find a prologue to *As you like it*. D——, I’ll give you one myself—one that comes as pat to the purpose as one of Sancho’s proverbs.”

He accordingly laid down his pipe, ordered the butler to wheel his great chair round, faced the audience, and commenced the prologue to *Pyramus and Thisbe* :

If these lads offend, it is with their good will.
That you should think, they come not to offend,
But with good will. To show their simple skill,
That is the true beginning of their end.”

Being, however, three parts drunk, he forgot the rest, could not regain the thread of his discourse, and sticking fast in his speech, finished it by roaring out the song of, “Hark the hollow woods resounding,” giving the view-halloo, yoiks, tally-ho, hark forward, tantivy, with the voice of a stentor. He then ordered his chair to be countermarched back again, and desired the performance to proceed.

Before the first scene was gone through, however, he had interrupted the performance half-a-dozen times, and read the actors such a lecture, that they found it difficult to play their parts at all.

“Harkee, gentlemen, vagabonds both,” he

roared, "see that ye stick to the advice given ye by the great, glorious, good, and wondrous Will. Give us less bellowing and strutting, good master Orlando ; and do you, old Adam, play your part like a hale old man. Less of that whistling and piping with childish treble. My service to ye : that's better ; ha, ha ! Now you're at it again, Orlando," he continued ; " hiss me that fellow off. Ah ! shame on ye both ; you're acting abominably, and speaking what was never intended or set down for ye. Yoiks, tally-ho, ho ! boys ; hark forward, there to him, rattler hilloo, ho, ho !"

It was thus the old Squire continued to torment those of the performers who displeased him in their efforts ; and sooth to say, being as sorry a set, with one exception, as ever stepped upon the boards, and never having attempted *As you like it* before, knowing hardly anything of their parts too, they really deserved his censure.

Meanwhile, the audience continued in one roar of laughter from beginning to end of the first scene ; whilst the squire, what with twinges of the gout, and the repeated shocks he received at hearing every line of his favourite play mis-spoken, continued to make such diabolical faces,

and utter so many complaints, that the actors were reduced to the same situation.

Amiens was the exception I have mentioned. He was personated by a remarkably good-looking young lad, who had only joined the company a few days before, a stranger to all the company, and although he had apparently never before followed the profession, an exceeding good actor. The squire was enraptured with him as soon as he made his appearance, laid down his pipe, and insisted on drinking his health in a bumper immediately. He also fell desperately in love with the lady who played Rosalind.

"Fine gal," said he, "by the Lord ; with a most sweet voice ; plays Rosalind like an angel,—a heavenly Rosalind ! My service to ye, lass, I wish ye merry, and a better Orlando than that thin-faced gull we have just hissed off." In short, the Squire applauded Rosalind to the echo, and her beauty and liveliness restored the good humour which the two sticks of the former scene had disturbed.

Thus the first act ended, and my turn approached. I cannot say that I felt quite easy under this sort of infliction ; indeed the whole company were rendered somewhat nervous by the downright Old Squire and his uncereemonious

remarks. He was getting more fuddled, too, and ever and anon complaining of the delay between the acts, crying out for Jaques and his favourite speech about the poor sequestered deer in the forest; whilst his two lovely daughters, hanging about his chair, sought to quiet his irritability, and persuade him to fill his glass less often.

Our company had been rather put to it for a supply of foresters for the scene, and some of the old gentleman's serving men, two grooms, the helper and the footman, had been pressed into the service, and put into such costume as the exigence would allow of; for the company were not only wanting in figures for the play, but there was also a difficulty in dressing them when found. In fact, the strolling company resembled that described by Goldsmith, when the same coat which served Romeo turned with the blue lining outward, served for his friend Mercutio; a large piece of crape sufficed at once for Juliet's petticoat and pall; a pestle and mortar from a neighbouring apothecary's answered all the purposes of a bell, and the landlord's own family, wrapped in white sheets, served to fill up the procession.

Under these circumstances, which I did

not discover till just before we had assembled to play our parts, I felt considerable annoyance, especially when I had to make my debut before such an unceremonious judge as was seated before us. I felt as much ashamed of my companions, indeed, as Falstaff did of his recruits. However, the bell invited us, the second act commenced, and "my co-mates and brothers in exile" were fairly in Arden.

Meanwhile, whilst the second act was thus in preparation, the hearty old buck had been drinking potations pottle deep, and completely sewed up the one fiddler who, seated before the lights arranged across the room, constituted our orchestra.

"Hang thee, thou villanous scraper," he roared, "thou hast played us but that one sorry tune all this time. Thou shalt drink, man—there's rum punch for thee. Egad, but I'll put life into thy precious fiddle-bow!"

In short, the fiddler was soon whistled drunk, and like Master Robert Shallow, was carried off to bed.

The similitude of our company to the description of the strollers above, was indeed, nearer than the reader would have imagined; for the doublet of Orlando was, with many apologies, appropriated by the manager, with the addition

of a hunting bugle and a cross-hilted *couteau de chasse*, as the hunting-gear of the melancholy Jaques. How they intended to manage when Orlando and Jaques would appear on the stage together, I know not, nor indeed had I ever an opportunity of discovering, for the performance came to an abrupt close before we arrived at that part of the play.

The good Duke was played by my friend, the manager, who was both short and fat; I myself was upwards of six feet in height, and the rest of the foresters were as ungainly in their appearance as they were motley in apparel. However, I played my part to the satisfaction of the audience. The Squire was enraptured, broke his crutch in applauding, and drank my health half-a-dozen times, before I had got through his favourite speeches about the wounded deer. The ladies also did me the favour to approve of my personation of the character, and threw their bouquets at my feet. The Squire praised my voice, the ladies my person.

"D——," cried the former, "but that fellow can act. There's none of your clipping and cutting, wringing and clinging, attitudinizing, ranting and raving, like a beggar in an epileptic fit.

He's a good man's picture too : a good-looking, strong fellow."

In fact the whole audience, from the master of the mansion to the kitchen wench, were enchanted with my powers, and I felt elevated accordingly, when another unlucky stroke of fortune once more levelled me to the common standard of humanity. In the next scene Orlando was absent without leave; we were to have exchanged coats again, as per agreement, whilst Duke Frederick gives directions to his people to make search after Celia and Rosalind. The stage waited, however, and no Orlando was to be found.

"Dang that weasel-gutted Orlando," said the Squire, "I suppose he's gone along with Rosalind and Celia to Arden."

"I would it were no worse, Sir," said the butler, who had left the room to help the search, and now returned, with a face of dismay. "But my pantry is completely sacked, and all the plate gone with them."

It was too true : gone he was, together with the gentleman who had played the wrestler, and Old Adam. They had taken advantage of the whole household being spectators of the scene, and unmolested had packed

up and made off with all the plate they could readily lay their hands on. This of course caused an abrupt termination to the play. The Squire was in a furious rage; and ordering the doors to be secured, sent instantly for a constable to have us all conveyed before a magistrate. As for me, I fared worse than any of them; for Orlando, who had been priggish in the early part of the evening, had taken the opportunity of pocketing one or two of the stray spoons, before he changed his coat; and the idea of the greater robbery striking him, from seeing the plate left exposed in the pantry, he had in his eagerness overlooked the more petty theft, and left me the reversion of his misdeeds.

I might, however, have still escaped disgrace but for my own wilfulness, as the Squire declined at first to subject me to the ordeal of a search. I, however, insisted upon being searched like the rest, and, to the horror of myself and astonishment of the audience, in the pockets of my doublet were discovered the drumsticks of a devilled turkey, a slice of cold plum-pudding, two silver forks, and a gravy-spoon.

It was in vain that I protested my innocence, and accounted for the stolen articles being found

upon me in consequence of having assumed the real thief's doublet. It was in vain that I protested that my ignorance of the knowledge of the treasures I carried about me was but another proof of my honesty, as, although I had been annoyed by their weight and clatter, even whilst I enacted my part, I had forborne to make search after the annoyance, in consideration that the pockets of another man's coat ought to be as sacred from my fingers, whilst on my back, as if it was on his own. The Squire, now in a maudlin state, and past reasoning with, was inexorable. He vowed he could have consented to forgive me if I had not acted Jaques so well, and I doubly deserved punishment accordingly.

"None but men of fine parts, I tell thee, lass," he said to his daughters, who urged the impossibility of my intending to commit the felony, "none but men of fine parts deserve to be hanged. This is some stage-struck youth, who has run away from his friends; and by the blood of the Mirabels, this will be a lesson to him as long as he lives. Take him awa, constable, kick the rest o' them out of doors, and send out horse and foot after the other runagates."

CHAPTER V.

I'll disrobe me
And suit myself,
As does a Briton peasant : so I'll fight ;
So I'll die.

Away, boy, from the troops, and save thyself ;
For friends kill friends, and the disorder's such
As war were hood-winked.

SHAKSPERE.

SUCH was the commencement and finish of my theatrical career. I was now utterly disgusted with life, and, like Macbeth, "'gan to be aweary of the sun." The shame and disgrace of this last business affected me more than any thing that had yet happened.

It was on the third evening after these unfortunate theatricals, that as I was seated in the cell of the prison to which I had been conveyed, I felt so totally unhinged at the sad prospect before me, I was tempted almost to end my life and misfortunes together. Dejected and wretched,

without one ray of comfort, my eye rolled from the roof to the floor of the wretched cell in which I was confined, in all the frenzy of despair, and seizing a knife which lay upon the table before me, I was about to plunge it into my heart, when my hand was stayed by some one, who, in the agony of my mind, I had not previously noticed being admitted to visit me.

My visitor seated himself unceremoniously upon the truckle bed which stood beside the walls of my cell, and I knew him directly for the youth who played the part of Amiens at Wildhawk Hall.

"I have arrived, it seems, at an opportune moment," said he. "Avoid that last resort of the unhappy, Mr. Snooks. Combat the fiend. I bring you good news; the real thief has been discovered. Master Orlando, and his companions were yesterday taken at Liverpool. They have completely exonerated you from all share in the theft. You may, therefore, consider yourself at liberty."

It had struck me, during the time we had been acting, that I had somewhere seen features which closely resembled those of this youth; but I totally failed in calling to mind who he bore so great a likeness to amongst my recent friends. He was a slight, effeminate-looking lad, with hair

dark as the raven's wing, and the complexion of a gipsy.

The miserable soon make acquaintance ; and we became friends from that hour. I was the more inclined to meet his advances towards an intimacy, as I found he had exerted himself greatly to discover the delinquents in the recent robbery, and prove my innocence. He seemed, like myself, "out of suits with fortune," and to have moved in a genteeler sphere than that in which I beheld him. So much of his history he confided to me, that, being at variance with his relatives, he had taken to the stage, and being a good musician, with an agreeable voice, he intended to quit the present wretched company, and try for an engagement amongst a better set. We agreed, therefore, to club our small stock of cash together, and together resolved to seek for better fortune.

As soon, therefore, as I was formally set at liberty, we took our leave of the town of Derby, in whose prison I had thus been for a short time an inmate, and together took our way to Manchester. Here we got an engagement with the company at that time playing there ; and becoming favorites with the manufacturing audience, managed to put money in our purse. With all our predilection, however, for the pro-

fession we had chosen, Gilpin Swart, for that was the name he chose me to know him by, found it was not quite so much to our taste as we had anticipated. To meet the tastes of the audience before whom we exhibited, we were compelled to play our parts according to their ideas, instead of our own. To speak and act as nature dictated made no impression; but to strain the voice to an unnatural pitch, then suddenly drop it to a whisper, in fact to rave and bellow, attitudinize and strut, was we found, the only way to merit applause amongst the mob—the only way, too, to gain it. We therefore, resolved to quit a town where monkeys and wild beasts were evidently more suitable to the tastes of the inhabitants than actors of the legitimate drama.

It is not necessary to dwell upon the straggling life we now led for many months, eating where we could get it, and at times half starved for weeks together. There is perhaps no class of individuals more thoughtless or improvident than the poor player. Whilst pinched with hunger, he is compelled to appear merry as a grig, in order to move to laughter the pampered and the *ennuyés*; yet no sooner has he coin in his pocket, than in the licence of the tavern it is spent.

My youthful companion was a great comfort to me in my adversity. As long as he was with me, so attentive was he to all my wayward wants and wishes, that he was more like my servant than my friend. There was, however, a reserve about him which I could never sufficiently account for. I could never "delve him to the root," and find out the slightest cue to his history. It was a silent sorrow that he bore with him: a grief he never expressed. But his attachment to myself was unbounded since the time we had first met, and I returned his friendship in an equal degree, and forbore to press him for his secret.

It was whilst we were amusing the inhabitants of the town of Gravesend with our professional powers, that I first heard of the intended organization of a body of Englishmen for the service of the Queen of Spain. Totally disgusted with our present mode of life, the idea of something in the way of actual service, was delightful to me, and I instantly resolved to enroll myself under the banners of the British Legion.

I broke the subject to my companion; but he rather, I thought, disliked the idea. He turned

pale at its mention, and tried to dissuade me from the project. I was, however, so determined on the adventure, that he at last agreed to go with me. Like Archer and Aimwell, I resolved, rather than starve by slow degrees in the streets of an English village, to drag my unfortunate body to some foreign counterscarp, and die gallantly in the breach. I was the more resolved in this as I had learned, within the last month or so, that my father still resided abroad, very much involved and straitened in his circumstances, still completely under the influence of his wife and her relatives, though much better in health ; and he had so great an aversion to my very name, that it was never allowed to be mentioned in his presence. He had completely disinherited me.

As we heard that the part of the Legion which had just departed upon the expedition, was on its first enrolment in rather a disorganized state, being composed of "the cankers of a calm world and long peace," we resolved, as we had a few pounds at that time in our pockets, to seek the Spanish shore, and there offer our services, in the hope of obtaining commissions in the force, or serving at all events in a somewhat less degrading situation than that of private soldiers.

When, however, we arrived in Spain, and sought the head quarters, I found, on reconnoitering, so many faces that I had seen and known whilst running my brief military career in England, that I was unwilling to have my story canvassed. The chances were, I thought, that I should quickly involve myself in fresh quarrels with my brother officers, even if I did obtain a commission; and, together with my young companion, I enrolled myself in the corps of —, a flank battalion, composed of desperadoes brave as the weapons they carried, brothers in arms as in adversity, ready to die for each other as to eat with each other, and vowing neither to give nor receive quarter in the field.

This corps, indeed, suited our purpose to a hair. We had professed to each other that we came to Spain to die; to be rid of life in battle, unknown, uncared for, “sword in hand.” For myself this was excusable, as I knew there was no distinction I could gain, no rank in the service I had enlisted into, which would restore me to that which I once had been, or ever again give me the friends I had once owned. But I ought to have hesitated before I led my youthful companion

to take so desperate a step, and involve him in the dangers of such a service.

However, young as he was, he seemed equally ready to set his life upon this cast as myself. For him, he said, existence had no charm; life held out no hope. For a whole year we had now been together, I had never once seen him smile. With these feelings, we were the very fellows for the death and glory men, and were received into this splendid battalion as worthy comrades of those who professed, for the most part, the same sentiments as ourselves. Men from various nations were enrolled in this corps amongst the hardy Basques, Poland, France, Italy, Germany, and other countries had their representatives, all professing the same dreadful carelessness of life, and vowing neither to give nor take it in the field.

It is unnecessary, as it would be painful, to describe the scenes I witnessed whilst serving amongst those gallant and desperate men. Death we beheld in its most hideous form, till he became absolutely uncared for from his very familiarity amongst us; and my companion and myself grew in great estimation with the whole corps.

Gilpin Swart especially had endeared himself

to all who knew him, by his quiet manners, his affection to me his comrade, and his gallantry and cleverness in action. Though so slight and youthful in figure, he was capable of enduring fatigue with the strongest Basque in the company to which he belonged. Towards myself especially his devotion was as extraordinary as it was heroic; twice he had saved my life in the field, when severely wounded I lay helpless where I had been shot down. Whether or not the experiment of seeking for an alleviation to the cares and miseries of an unhappy life, answered with others who had enrolled themselves in this service, I know not; to many it brought the bloody death they professed to seek, whilst others again seemed to imagine that in outvying their comrades in the recklessness of their deeds they both revenged and forgot the sorrows that had sent them as offerings to the "fire-eyed maid of smoky war." Gilpin and I, however we might admire the conduct of this brave band when in the field, saw many things that filled us with horror and affright, in the dreadful deeds which were sometimes enacted when the field was fought and won. One act perpetrated by some members of the corps, at length brought down so dreadful

a punishment upon them, that the remembrance will never be effaced from my mind.

It was whilst we in lay in Grenada, that a party of men from various nations committed an act of sacrilege and murder of so heinous a nature, that the General resolving to put a stop to the repeated crimes which had lately taken place, after in vain endeavouring to discover the real culprits in the transaction, determined to resort to the old law of decimation.

Accordingly, the regiment being paraded in the principal square of the town, the business proceeded; I would willingly spare myself the relation of the painful scene which followed, but that it is necessary to my unlucky tale. The culprits were, I believe, known to many of their comrades, yet no man, even to save himself from the awful chance, thought for one instant of giving up their names. The act for which, perhaps, the innocent were about to suffer, had been a dreadful and wicked act, but the Guides professed the most chivalrous devotion towards each other, and to the last address of the General, requiring them to spare him the dreadful alternative, by denouncing the guilty, they were silent to a man. I pass by unnoticed the splendour of the scene; the sun's rays

glinted back from the arms of the different regiments drawn up in that awful square ; the gallant staff which attended the General, and all the pride and pomp consequent upon the imposing nature of the dreadful example about to be given. Indeed I scarcely marked it. Drawn out amongst the battalion about to be told off, I felt no fear for myself ; but a dreadful apprehension of the lot falling upon my youthful comrade, so unmanned me, that I could scarcely stand. I glanced along the line, and every face was stern as if about to receive the word of command to charge upon the enemy's lines. I ventured one look upon poor Gilpin, and his countenance was as placid and happy as if he was about to witness a bridal, instead of the dreadful scene shortly to be enacted. I scarcely stop to notice the horrors of suspense, whilst the numbers were called, and every tenth man ordered to the front, and added to the ghastly body so shortly to be slaughtered.

To be brief, what I dreaded, actually happened—the ninth number fell upon myself, the tenth upon Gilpin Swart. From the moment we were enranked upon this ghastly parade, I felt it would be so, and yet the reality came upon me like a stroke of thunder. I

felt myself the murderer of this poor and affectionate boy.

Rushing from the ranks in a frenzy of despair, I entreated of the officer in command, that I might myself, take the fate which had fallen upon my friend. The whole battalion, iron men as they were, would have scarcely hesitated the exchange, so greatly had the youth endeared himself to all. It was, however, in vain that I sought to take the fatal lot upon myself; it was in vain I said he was a boy—a perfect child, who was about to suffer—innocent of the crime as the Commander-in-chief. It was in vain I pleaded that he had friends and connexions of rank and fortune in England, who doubtless grieved for his absence, and would be made happy by his return; whilst I myself, alone in the world, without home, without friends; without country—life a burthen, unknown, unmourned, should bless the chance which ridded me of existence.

My vehemence, notwithstanding the opposition of my friend, caused the officer, to whom I addressed myself, to pause and refer to the Commander-in-chief.

“’Tis in vian you plead for me,” said Gilpin, as we stood locked in each other’s arms. “There is no power can alter the stern law that

dooms me ; and even if your generous wish should be allowed, I oppose myself to its being carried into effect. I wish to die, and embrace my fate with cheerfulness. Grieve not for me, my friend, but grant me one request, and I am happy. Take this letter, and with it give me your promise, that you will forbear perusing its contents till the volleying musketry has for ever separated us."

Hardly knowing what I uttered, I gave the promise, and received the letter. The next moment he was enranked amongst the doomed. I remember little more of the dreadful scene; a dizziness came before my eyes as I beheld him standing amongst that unhappy section. The dreadful sound of musketry seemed to tear open my brain, and I fell heavily upon the earth.

For one moment I had resolved to break open the letter I held in my hand, in hopes something in its contents might have saved my friend ; but his eye was upon me, even whilst the fatal muskets of the firing party were being brought to the present, and the remembrance of my sacred word held my hand. Unlucky in that, as in almost every act of my life, had I broken the seal and my promise, I had saved my friend.

When I recovered my senses, I found myself lying on a pallet stretched upon the flooring of one of the cells of the convent, the Guides were then quartered in. At first I looked wildly around for the faithful friend, the youthful comrade, who had been my intimate and inseparable comrade, my adopted brother. In the next the scene wherein I had borne so prominent a part, presented itself in all its dread reality before me, and I recollected the packet poor Gilpin had, with almost his dying lips, recommended to my perusal. It was still fast clutched in my hand, and tearing it open, I eagerly perused its contents. Grief, astonishment, and regret wholly pervaded me as I did so.

The contents ran somewhat thus:—

“She who pens these words, your sometime comrade, Gilpin Swart, is a female, and the daughter of your bitterest foe.

“A presentiment that the doom of death surely awaits me in the dread trial we are about to undergo, has induced me to change the firm resolve I had made, never to divulge my secret, and stand confessed to one I have loved, not wisely, but too well.

“Could, indeed, the purest, the most disinterested, the most unstained love, expiate the

offences and the villany of that part of my family, whose dark deeds have brought down ruin upon your head, that expiation had been mine.

“To be brief, for I have now small time to make the confession: from the first hour I saw you in your father’s residence, I loved you. Your generous nature, your high and chivalrous bearing, your sorrows, and even your pride, together with all the evils that fell upon you from the machinations of my own family were additional incentives to my ardent affection, and converted that love into a species of adoration.

“The utter hopelessness of my feelings ever meeting with the slightest return, was no bar to my indulgence in the secret affection which wholly pervaded me; that most fantastic of passions, which, once felt, is never forgotten. In fine, it was my only, my dearest indulgence, to contemplate you from a distance—to live but on a glance of your passing form, during your short visits to and from the Grange.

“After you had left your home, exiled by the vile intrigues of my own family, I sought an interview with my father, upbraided him with the injustice and iniquity which had made you

an alien from your only parent's heart ; and in disgust, quitted his roof for ever.

"It was a rash resolve ; but once taken, it was irrevocable. My only wish was, to see or hear something of one I but too well knew would have held me in his hate, and scorned the folly that led me to follow him, had he known the fact. But I had two excuses—a head filled with romance, and a wretched home. I therefore took a ship-boy's semblance, and followed him I loved.

"Although often near you in your career, no chance presented itself by which I might obtain my most ardent wish ; namely, that of being so situated, that I might, without suspicion, be continually beside you.

"At length you know the chance which threw us together. Unsuspected in sex and name, I became your friend and comrade, 'as we learned, played, eat together ;' and wheresoe'er we went, still we went coupled and inseparable. During the toilsome march, I have listened to the melody of your voice ; in the lonely bivouac I have watched over you as you slept ; and in the tented field, I have shared your rations. That I might fall before you, has been my sole and continual prayer. I feel now that the day, the

very hour has arrived. One of those certain presentiments, which never deceive, has wholly pervaded me since the announcement of the punishment awaiting our band. Farewell, then, for ever ! The knowledge that you will hold me in your hate, on learning my name, will never now sadden the heart of

“ CATHERINE LEVISON.”

CHAPTER VI.

Not a soul
But felt a fever of the mad, and played
Some tricks of desperation. All but mariners
Plunged in the foaming brine, and quit the vessel,
Then all a-fire with me ; the King's son, Ferdinand,
With hair up staring, (then like reeds, not hair),
Was the first man that leaped ; cried, ' Hell is empty,
And all the devils are here.'

SHAKSPERE.

THE circumstance which I have just related, was as singular as it was unlooked for, and unsuspected. A hundred little incidents, which rushed upon my memory—incidents which had happened during my intimacy with this unhappy being, now struck me so forcibly as to cause me to wonder I had never suspected her sex. The mystery in which her whole history was involved, her secluded habits, and the devotion she had shown to me, even during the short time we had been companions, and associated with this gallant band, all

now came before me so vividly, as to make me absolutely astonished at my own blindness in not fathoming her secret. But the stirring life we had led, the dreadful scenes we had gone through, and the abstracted nature of my thoughts, incident to my fallen and degraded situation, had so wholly engrossed me, that I was both careless and regardless of matters which would doubtless have struck me in calmer and happier hours.

As may be surmised, this incident sufficiently satisfied my cravings for active service in Spain. A degree of horror of the service I was in now pervaded my mind; a carrion death seemed to sit and grin at me wherever I turned my eyes. The struggle in which I was engaged seemed marked with unnecessary cruelty, and I resolved at the first opportunity to leave it.

I was destined, however, to meet with further adventures before I did so; and it was not until the British Legion was virtually broken up, that, after I had served in numerous actions, affairs, and skirmishes, more than once narrowly escaping the death I professed to seek both by the sword and pestilence, that I quitted Spain, and all but penniless embarked on board a British steamer for the Thames.

The ill-fortune which so constantly followed, dogged the heels, and made calamity of my life, still pervaded me even on the mighty deep. During the night we were visited by an awful tempest, and our labouring barque, fretting with her paddles, and groaning and creaking in the angry waters, for some time beating, heaving, and clambering amongst the surge, seemed a solitary mark for the darting lightning to vent its fury upon, every flash showing more plainly the horrors of the black-looking depths around. At length, after lying like a speck amidst the violence of the roaring tide, during the greater part of the night, we were rendered utterly helpless, our engines swamped, our fires extinct, and the vessel consequently, a log upon the water.

It was lucky for us that the storm had now begun to subside, for, to add to our wretched state, with sailors exhausted, and passengers at their prayers, it was suddenly discovered that the vessel was on fire. A sight now ensued such as I had never beheld in all my former career—a sight, of all others most calculated to impress the minds of the beholders with the might, the magnificence of the Creator, and the utter helplessness of the poor crippled beings thus unprofitably

leading the angry waters. A small, insignificant, and trifling machine, an atom, was alight upon the surging waves ; the frightened beings who clung about it, apparently alone in a world, over which the dark flood seemed rolling from end to end.

Frightful death seemed now certain to the half-maddened crew. All that was possible had been attempted, in our adverse circumstances, to put out the fire, but in vain ; and it yet seemed even doubtful by which death the majority were to die, whether the hot ship would go hissing headlong down the black-looking hell beneath, or whether she would continue to heave upon the surface till she burned to the water's edge.

The confusion was dreadful. Many, unable to contemplate the fate awaiting them, threw themselves into the sea ; others, in their efforts to gain the part most distant from the flames, were washed off, and shrieking, carried down ; whilst the mass, crowded together where they had retreated foot by foot from the flames, stood with eyes distended, crushed upon each other, as each tremendous wave threw the burning vessel from side to side.

It was whilst I stood clinging to the rigging,

that my eye fell upon a party of the passengers, whom till now I had not seen.

I myself was in the garb of a common soldier, the uniform of the Guides, my face begrimed, and umbered with dirt and smoke, consequent upon my endeavours whilst assisting the sailors in their efforts at subduing the fire. Thus unheeded in the glaring light of the conflagration, I swung myself up the side of the vessel, forced my way amidst the press, and next moment stood beside a female, the sight of whom had, for the moment, driven even the awful situation I was in from my recollection. When I had succeeded in reaching the spot, I found that the first glance had not deceived me. Leaning upon, and supported by her father and the captain of the vessel, and regarding the scene with a resigned and steady eye, her cheek like monumental alabaster, and endeavouring to speak words of comfort to her parent's ear, was one who, in happier hours I had so well known—the Lady Constance de Clifford.

My surprize at finding them passengers with me in this devoted steamer, was the next moment forgotten in the horror I felt at their apparent inevitable fate by so dreadful a death.

The sea meanwhile immediately around the

vessel, reflecting the hot flames, looked a bubbling caldron of molten gold; whilst all beyond the immediate influence of the fire, was as black and horrible, as the reflected hue of the crashing fire was terrifically brilliant and glowing.

"Oh, Heaven!" exclaimed the agonized father of the beautiful Lady de Clifford, as the increasing heat from the burning mass gave him a foretaste of the dreadful death his child must, before many minutes ensued, surely perish by. "Oh, Heavens! and is there then indeed no escape from this most cruel fate? O Heaven! how have I sinned that thus thy wrath should light so heavily upon me? I cannot pray, my Constance; cease to urge it. Were I alone, I might feel resigned; but this is too horrible. I cannot see thee perish thus by a painful death, scorching and suffocating in the increasing heat. By Heaven, we will follow the example set by the crew, and plunge and meet a milder fate!"

So saying, the Duke seized his daughter in his arms, and in a frenzy of despair was about to leap with her into the foaming sea; but I caught his arm, arrested the consummation, and pointed to a dark and shadowy object, just discernible as it plunged through the distant gloom.

The next moment a perfect yell arose from our vessel : " A sail, a sail ; we're saved ! "

It was true enough. A large vessel had, for the moment, crossed our path, and was again lost in the darkness. All was now silence and expectation. To the uninitiated, the very fact of a ship being at hand was a saving clause ; but the seamen knew better. No boat could live a minute in that sea. Our own boat had been seized, cut adrift, and instantly swamped, whilst the crew of the vessel were engaged below on the first alarm of the fire.

" There is hope, Captain," said the Duke, doubtfully, as he stood with eye intent, and body bent forwards, trying to peer into the gloom, where the ship had appeared.

The Captain was silent ; he knew too well there was none.

Another shriek of joy. The vessel had tacked, and appeared again. She came bravely on, running so dangerously near, that we seemed once or twice about to be hurled flaming upon her deck.

" A steamer," said the Captain ; " brave fellow whoever he is ; but he cannot aid us. I think I know the vessel : it's the Hotspur, Hon. Capt. Dareall commander."

"Can he do nothing for us?" inquired the Duke.

"Yes," said the captain, "one thing he might do to save us from this increasing misery. —By heaven, my brain's on fire," he continued wildly, as the wind blew the flames towards us; "I cannot longer endure this scorching heat."

"Speak," said the Duke; "for Heaven's sake, speak: what can be done for us?"

"He might pour a broadside into our vessel, and send us to the bottom," said the Captain, plunging headlong into the sea.

Despair again pervaded our ghastly crew. It was evident the stranger could render us no assistance. At this moment, some barrels of gunpowder, in the after-part of the vessel, where the fire raged, blew up, hurling a large fragment of the woodwork into the sea.

The mass came surging round, and was for the moment entangled in the fore-chains, close to where we stood.

"There's your only chance, my Lord," said I, pushing the Duke forward, seizing upon his daughter, and leaping upon the fragment, before the whole multitude beside us had time to swarm upon and overwhelm it.

The weight of those who gained the wreck,

disengaged it, and the next instant it was whirled clear.

It was, however, but a perilous and slippery craft; the water every moment washing over those who clung to its surface, and lessening the number in each succeeding wave. In one minute, the sudden darkness with which we were enrouned, showed that the burning vessel had gone down.

The lady had fainted; but I held her in one arm, whilst the other was twisted firmly amongst some fragments of rigging; the Duke also securely held on close beside us, as we lay.

Suddenly, the advancing paddles of the stranger showed she was at hand, cruizing about the spot where our vessel had gone down, in the vain hope to save her. The next minute, the rapid beat seemed close upon us. Still holding my precious charge, I raised myself upon my knees, and looked into the gloom before me.

Destruction from the advancing vessel seemed inevitable. I beheld the dark object, even upon the pitchy waves, just about to dash over us, as I raised, amidst the roar of the tempest, a yell of despair.

Under no circumstance is the discipline of an English ship of war relaxed. In the regu-

larity and silence with which the vessel was worked amidst the storm, my wailing cry was heard; and as the sound was carried onwards in the rushing wind, it was answered by the roar of the word of command, on the deck of the Hotspur. The prow of the vessel turned at the sound, merely grazing the fragment to which we clung, and which the next instant, crashing against the paddle-box, was driven beneath the waves. The moment I had seen the inevitable fate of our wretched raft, I had resolved to make one desperate effort to save Lady de Clifford; and as the prow of the steamer dipped in the water, in darting past, I had seized, with the grasp of a maniac, the fore-chains. Blue lights were at that moment ignited, and we were saved.

Too much exhausted to stand, I lay panting upon the slippery deck, where I had been hauled up by the sailors. My lovely burthen was safe. She had been hauled up with me, unlocked from my convulsive grasp, and carried down below.

But where was the Duke, her father, and the few sailors who had clung to the fragment when it was struck. Echo might have answered, "Where?"

Their fate was but too certain; since the star-

board paddle of the Hotspur was dashed to pieces with the blow, and the vessel itself was crippled upon the roaring tide.

The Hon. Augustus Dareall, commanding the Hotspur, was a young man of about five-and-thirty years of age, a good specimen of the British sailor. Gentlemanly, good-hearted, frank and brave; the ocean was his delight, and his ship the idol of his heart. As soon as the bustle consequent upon this accident to his vessel had subsided, and he felt himself at liberty to leave the deck, he turned his attention to the two persons who had been so miraculously snatched from the waves.

Struck with the surpassing beauty of the Lady de Clifford, who, still insensible, her long dark hair, mermaid-like, glittering in the salt spray, as she laid upon the sofa of the cabin to which the sailors had first conveyed her, he ordered the immediate attendance of the surgeon and the coxswain's wife to administer restoratives, and then directed her to be conveyed to a berth. He then inquired for the man who had been the means of saving her.

"Mr. Blowhard," said he to his lieutenant, as they turned to leave the cabin, "if the sea had swallowed up that specimen of female loveliness, I think I should have renounced it for

ever. She is another Venus, Sir, risen from the deep. I do not think I ever beheld so exquisite a face and form."

"A splendid craft, Sir," returned the Lieutenant. "I thought the first time I ever saw Mrs. Blowhard, she was a 'trim built wherry;' but Heaven save us, this lady—"

"Makes your swan a crow, Blowhard, eh!" returned the Captain. "Did you notice the poor fellow who held her so firmly in his grasp. In the hurry of the moment I had scarcely time to look on him."

"A common soldier, Sir," returned the Lieutenant, "one of the disbanded men of the British Legion, I think."

"I must see him," said the Captain, "and know who this female is. Let him be taken to my cabin, Mr. Blowhard, while I give a glance on deck. The wind is subsiding; we must make a run for the nearest port."

"The poor fellow is too much exhausted Sir," said the Lieutenant, "at present to be spoken with."

"Let him be carefully tended then," said the Captain; "and as soon as I have been above, I will come and see to him myself."

Accordingly when sufficiently recovered, I was visited by Captain Dareall, and examined

as to who and what myself and companion in misfortune were.

"Your appearance belies your garb, young man," he said: "you are not what you seem."

"A common soldier, Sir," I answered, "of the Anglo-Spanish Legion; nothing more."

"Enough," returned the commander. "I seek not to pry into another man's affairs. You have behaved like a gallant fellow, however, in managing to save the female your companion. Who is she?"

"The daughter of the Duke of Hurricane," said I, "Lady de Clifford."

"Indeed," returned the Captain, "I heard that the Duke of Hurricane was at Lisbon for his health. This lady then was a passenger on board that ill-fated vessel; going out, I suppose, to join her father. This is a lucky chance for you, young man—your fortune's made. Doubtless the Duke will reward you handsomely for your exertions in saving his only child."

"The Duke, Sir," said I, "is drowned. I saw him struck beneath the waters by your paddles. He was upon the fragment of the wreck, this vessel went over."

About a fortnight after the events narrated in

the foregoing chapter, two ladies were seated in the principal apartment of the governor's house at St. Sebastian; the younger female was evidently an invalid—she reclined upon a sofa. Her companion, who was very considerably her elder, paced the apartment as if not in the most amiable frame of mind. Both were in the deepest mourning, and the “dejected ’haviour of the visage” of the invalid, proclaimed her as melancholy as her garb.

The elder female was the Duchess of Hurricane; the younger was her daughter Lady de Clifford. The Duchess had but lately arrived from England, summoned by the news of her recent bereavement, and her daughter's consequent dangerous illness.

There was a pause in the conversation for a few minutes; at length the Duchess stopping, and regarding her daughter for some little time, thus addressed her:

“Lady de Clifford,” said she, “I am indeed surprised at the continuance of your folly. I must really insist upon your giving up this nonsense. The interest you feel about this youth is as disgraceful to yourself as degrading to your family. I have so far conceded to your wishes, as to permit every inquiry to be made after this man; and had we been successful in

finding him there is no reward I would not have conferred upon him, even to the half of my fortune, in return for the service he has rendered; but to see the daughter of a de Clifford thus pining after a beggarly outcast, degraded and worthless as this man, this Blount, has proclaimed himself, believe me, I had rather you had perished in the ocean, than that the world should know of your folly. You are now sufficiently recovered to travel, and next week I shall insist upon your setting out. I hate the sea, and this last melancholy catastrophe has given me even a greater distaste than ever of it. I shall rather therefore chance the dangers of a land journey, even in this distracted land. We will cross the Pyrenees into France, and winter in Paris."

The Lady de Clifford made no reply.

"Is not this too ridiculous," continued the Duchess, addressing the Honorable Captain Dareall, who at that moment entered the room; "I am sure I have to apologise to you for all the trouble my daughter has given in thus requesting of you to search out the soldier, who saved her life."

"It is worthy of her noble nature, Madam," returned the Captain. "I honour Lady de Clifford for the interest she has betrayed."

"Have you been more successful?" inquired Lady de Clifford, without heeding her mother's angry looks; "I am anxious, before I leave St. Sebastian, to make every possible effort to discover this young man; not only in order that I may be the means of rewarding and extricating him from the difficulties in which he seems to be, but that during the horrors of our situation, I thought I recognised one whom I knew in happier hours. Nay I cannot have been mistaken. There was but one man who could have saved me, amidst the terrors of that night."

"There are many men, Lady de Clifford," said the Captain, drawing his chair closer to the sofa on which she reclined, "who would have tried, ay, and blessed the chance that sent them to your aid."

"Your description," said the Lady de Clifford (evading the intended compliment), "confirms me in my supposition. Did you by no chance, during our passage hither, learn his name?"

"Whilst on board the Hotspur he was studious to conceal it," said the Captain; "but his clothes made a false report of him: he was evidently of a rank in life, superior to the situation of a private soldier."

The Lady de Clifford heaved a sigh.

"He shunned all intercourse," continued

the Captain, "with myself and officers. To his sad mind his misery seemed disgrace; that at least was the impression I had of him whilst on board the Hotspur. On reaching the port, after thanking me, as I told you, for the attention he had received, he was one of the first to leap on shore, and I saw him no more."

The Lady Constance sank back upon the couch, leaned her cheek upon her hand, and seemed lost in thought.

"You will pardon me," said the Captain, after regarding her for a few moments, "if I venture to say that this youth cannot, I think, be a person you have known in former days."

"I am sure of it," said the Duchess, quickly; "then you have discovered him, Captain Dareall."

"I have not, Madam," returned the Captain; "but those I have employed, have at length succeeded in tracing him. He has left St. Sebastian, and he will be lucky if he escape out of the country. For his services rendered Lady de Clifford, I hope and trust he will."

"I begin to think this is our man, after all," said the Duchess. "What has he done, Captain Dareall, robbed a church?"

"No, madam, not exactly that; though, perhaps, what in this country will be considered ven far greater sacrilege; indeed, I may say, you are not far off the truth: he has robbed the Church, in one sense, for he has broken into a convent, and stolen a nun."

The Lady Constance again threw herself back upon the couch, and hid her face in her hands.

"I could have sworn it," said the Duchess. "Ratcliffe Blount to the life; was not that the name Captain Dareall, he went by."

"No, Madam," returned the Captain; "Peter Snooks was the name the person who saved your daughter's life went by."

"Now, Constance," said the Duchess, "I hope you are satisfied."

"I am, Madam," returned the young lady.

CHAPTER VII.

How wildly then walks my estate in France.

Hark !

It was the owl that shrieked, the fatal bellman
Which givest the stern'st good night. He is about it.

SHAKSPERE.

My departure from St. Sebastian was indeed earlier than I had intended. It was hastened by a circumstance which happened to me a few days after Captain Dareall, had put in there to refit.

Trusting that Lady de Clifford had not recognised me in the degraded situation I was reduced to whilst our crippled vessel made for the nearest port, I kept myself as much aloof from all intercourse with the officers of the vessel as possible, and studiously avoided being seen by them on shore. Indeed, Captain Dareall had enough to employ him in keeping

his vessel afloat till he arrived in port, for the damage she had sustained in the gale was greater than at the time he imagined. Lady de Clifford too, was so seriously unwell, that I saw her not again whilst we were on board; I however managed to ascertain that she had been received upon landing at the house of the governor, and that soon afterwards the Duchess had arrived from England.

The Duke I found had, some time before, been advised to try a milder climate, in consequence of an affection of the lungs, resulting from the wound he had received from Lord Cœur de Lion. He had wintered at Madeira, was greatly recovered, and the Duchess having preceded him to England a few months before, he had touched at Lisbon on his intended homeward voyage. How that had turned out, we have seen in the foregoing chapter.

Keeping now, therefore, as much secluded during the day as possible, I resolved to make my way across the Pyrenees and enter France. Upon deliberation, I resolved to present myself at the Château Roussillon, where, when I had last heard of my father, he was residing, and observe how matters were progressing there. The letter I had read from the unfortunate being, Charlotte Levison, had frequently recurred

to me of late, and my ideas were a good deal changed by it: I began to think that it was my duty to see after my parent, and myself observe the situation he was in. After having visited him, it was my intention to try and get into the Austrian service. A few dollars yet remained in my pocket; I was as hardy and strong as the mountaineers I had served with, and I only lingered from day to day, in the vain hope of getting but a passing glance of Lady de Clifford before she left.

One night, as I wandered through the town, in passing the angle of the wall of a convent, a small postern door was hurriedly dashed open, and a man, his sword drawn in his hand, darted into the street. He glanced hastily around, and seeing me as I stood in the shadow of the wall, called me to him.

"A soldier," he said, soon as I approached him, "and an Englishman. Good. Bear a hand here for a few moments, my lad. My friend has failed me, you must take his place; follow quickly and silently."

Returning the way he came, he re-entered the dark postern, and the next moment we were withinside the convent walls. A dark lantern stood upon the pavement, which he snatched up, and darting into a cavernous recess cut

in one side of the passage we had entered, he brought forth a female, closely muffled up from head to foot.

"Take this lady," said he, hurriedly, "and await me beside the postern by which we entered. In two minutes I will join you." So saying, he bounded up a flight of stone steps, and we were left in darkness. I did as he requested of me, for I thought at the moment I recognized a voice I had somewhere heard before. Almost carrying my charge, who seemed too much alarmed to walk without great assistance, I groped my way back, and opening the postern in readiness to make a fair start, awaited the coming of my employer.

The moon now shone full upon my companion as I continued to support her trembling form, and I found I had possession of a nun, and as far as I could judge by her clinging form, she was both young and handsome.

Hardly had I made the discovery when the clash of weapons was heard in the distance, withinside the building, and the hurried tread of some one leaping down the stone staircase six steps at a bound. I knew not at the moment, whether to stand fast, or fly, and to

add to my discomfort, the great bell of the convent began to ring furiously.

Meanwhile, the footsteps approached, and my new comrade rushed to my side. "Run for it," said he, "unless you wish half-a-dozen stilettos to hack each other in your body."

Clasping the fair incognita, and sweeping her along, myself assisting him in the effort, he dashed across the street in which the convent was situated, and after turning down one by passage and up another, he made for the suburbs of the town.

Here he led us along a dark and dismal-looking lane, till we came to a lone building, the door of which being unlocked, he dashed it open with his foot, entered, and carefully bolting it behind him, introduced us into a good-sized apartment.

"Huzza!" said he, laughing as he proceeded to light one of the tapers upon the table, we've cheated the Pope for once. Thanks, my good fellow," said he to me, "for your assistance. You've helped me to steal a nun. But how is this?" continued he, returning towards me, after he had seated his charge upon a couch, and disencumbered her of some part of the disguise she was muffled in. "Do my eyes deceive me; or is this Ratcliffe Blount?"

I was as much surprized as himself. It was my friend, Altamont di Montdider. He had commanded a regiment during the recent struggle, and played as many fantastic tricks whilst in Spain as Cervantes describes himself to have done, whilst a captive among the Moors. The last of his exploits was the present theft.

There was small time for us to compare notes, as Altamont only waited for his friend, Captain Plume, who was engaged with him in this last business, to make the attempt at getting on board a vessel and sailing for England that night. Plume was to have met him at the convent of Santissima Donzella; failing in that, they were to rendezvous at the present refuge, which Altamont had hired for the occasion.

"This meeting," said he to me, during the intervals of his attendance upon the handsome *religieuse*, "is a curious chance. Of all men else I have most wished to discover you. When in England, according to my promise, I busied myself in your affairs, and have discovered much that it is of importance for you to know. Nay, acting under the advice of my solicitor, I have advertised you, sought you, and offered a reward for your apprehension. Having traced

you to Spain, I obtained leave and came out in search of you ; but the love of the profession drove your business quite out of my head, and I offered to serve here during this war. In fine, my friend," said he, "I advise you to quit with us to-night. Your presence, I think, is necessary at your father's residence in France, as he is completely in the power of those rogues, the Levisons, added to which, it is necessary I should carry you off, as by involving you in this affair of mine, St. Sebastian is no safe place for you to remain in. Come, then, and let us speed

For France ! for France ! for it is more than need."

There is necessarily a hiatus in the twisted and ravelled skein, as he himself in his memoirs designated it, of Ratcliffe Blount's history ; for after this adventure of his friend Altamont, Captain Plume, who was also a party in that action, became possessed of the manuscript which, during his leisure hours at St. Sebastian, he had amused himself by composing.

It appears, however, from what I have myself been able to learn on the subject, that

Altamont di Montdidier and his innamorata, together with the whole party, were traced to their retreat, and eventually surprized before they could embark with their prize; Ratcliffe Blount, with his usual luck, was the only one captured however, the rest making their escape to France.

Doubtless it would have gone hard with our friend had he not managed to escape from confinement soon after his capture, and get amongst some of his old companions in the mountains, from whence it was not very difficult for him, by evading the outposts of the Carlists, to cross the frontier.

It was then, on a raw and comfortless-looking winter's evening, that a solitary traveller was to be seen wending his way along the high road leading to Caen. He was but scantily clad against the severity of the season, having merely the coarse red clothing of a common soldier on his body, the said garments being considerably the worse for wear consequent upon hard service; an old red forage cap also graced his head, and a knapsack was upon his back.

His fine height and the graceful proportions of his well formed limbs, his head carried aloft with an air of the most determined courage

and resolution, was not, however, to be disguised by the soiled and tattered condition of the poor habiliments he wore; and the peasant-girl, as she tripped across his path, was fain to stop and look back upon the handsome appearance of the young soldier as he passed. There was, however, no answering glance in the corner of the traveller's eye, as the lively villager regarded him; but stern resolution, and a determination to devour space, and get over the long miles, seemed to possess him as he strode onwards.

A stout oaken cudgel was in his hand, useful either as an assistant in his journey, or as a defence against assault. The night was settling down dark and sudden, and the pattering rain upon the foliage of the densely wooded country he traversed, together with the distant rumble of the thunder, announced to the traveller the approach of a storm.

He had made inquiry at the last post-house he had stopped at in the road, (some five miles back), for the Château Roussillon, and after receiving a direction to it, had also with apparent carelessness added a few questions about its present occupiers.

An English family, he was told, had been residents in the château for some time; but the

neighbourhood knew little about them. They kept much within the grounds, and except travelling occasionally to and from Caen, were seldom to be seen.

The name of the old gentleman for whom the château was first of all taken was Blount, he understood; "Le Sieur Blount, camarado," said the ostler of the cabaret. "I was hired there myself when they first came as a helper in the stables. That was when Sir Blount first came from Angleterre. At that time he brought carriages, horses, hounds and many servants, just as any other English noble; but since that, things had gone on differently, and although the château had been almost newly furnished by the quantity of articles sent for from England at that period, together with plate and other valuables, yet the whole had been lately removed at different intervals, and sent to Paris, where my Lady Blount was wintering. Sir Blount himself," added the Frenchman, "I have heard, is *un peu volage*. Ha, ha!" he continued, as he turned off towards the stables; "you English swallow so much fog in your swampy island, that you are always troubled with de *vapeurs*, as you call it. Milor Blount, I have heard, has not been seen outside the château for some months. He

must be watched, or he might cut his throat some fine day. Ah, bah ! *un mauvais sujet*, with a d——d bad set about him.”

The traveller stayed not to hear more, but throwing down a few sous for what he had taken, hitched up his pack, and addressed himself to his journey. As soon as he came to a part of the road which was intersected by a narrow and shadowy lane, he stopped, and paused for a few minutes, looking carefully around him to mark the spot, as the increasing gloom covered the landscape.

“This,” he said, “must be my route, according to the direction given me : I was to turn to the right, when I came to a rough lane, some five miles and a half from the inn I inquired at.” In saying this, the soldier brandished his cudgel, and entering the gloomy thoroughfare, continued his progress up the ascent leading into the thick woods on his right. After about half an hour’s quick walking, he arrived at some large gates, flanked by a stout wall surrounding a sort of park or chace, and from whence he could plainly discern the château straight before him.

The gateway which thus brought him to a stand, was as ancient and forlorn-looking as the mansion it led to. Two large pillars

flanked it on either side, square, massive, and lofty. One was dismantled, a broken statue lying half buried in the long grass at its base; the other was adorned by the figure of the antlered Actæon, in the agony of being pulled down by his own dogs. The gates themselves were elaborately wrought, and of iron, and so ponderous withal, that had they been open, it would have required the efforts of a strong arm to swing them back upon their hinges; at the present time, however, they were fast locked.

Our traveller, after looking through the bars for a brief space, showed he was not likely to be stopped in his progress by locks, bolts, or bars, for taking his oaken clump between his teeth, he clambered up them with the agility of a cat; and as quickly surmounting them, spite of the iron spikes with which they were garnished, he descended on the other side, and stood next moment in the park of Roussillon, and bent his steps towards the château.

Château Roussillon was one of those comfortable looking edifices, at which the English are occasionally to be found economizing in the land of frogs and red-legged partridges, yclept France. It bore the stamp of by-gone grandeur, and had evidently felt the blasts of three centuries at least; but it had

nothing of that time-honoured and venerable appearance of our own Elizabethan Halls in merry England.

There was an indescribable air of discomfort about it—a sort of private mad-house appearance. It wanted something as a residence which the spectator could hardly define ; whilst even the grounds around it, had that rubbishing, unpicturesque look, so often to be found in a foreign domain.

The stranger, after trying the foredoor of the mansion with a force that made the lintels shake, stepped a pace or two back, and gazed at it for a few moments. The shutters of the various casements were fast closed, and it looked uninhabited in the front ; he, therefore, very deliberately walked round to the rear. There was no domestic to be seen about to interfere with his promenade, and his appearance being merely that of a sturdy applicant for bread, a disbanded legionist making his way homewards, the chances are, if he had met with any of the out-door dependants, a *sacre* and an order to leave the premises would have been perhaps all he would have been greeted with.

He was somewhat more fortunate in his application for admittance on this side the

gloomy building, for on lifting the latch of the door, after entering a sort of court-yard in the rear, he found himself in a long narrow passage, evidently leading to the servants' offices.

The mansion he now found was inhabited, as the passage was lighted by two or three common looking lanterns fixed to its walls, without whose dull flame the passenger would scarcely, even in the day time, have found his way.

Directing his steps along this passage, the soldier now entered the kitchen. There was fire in the grate, and even signs of its recently having been used, articles of culinary use being strewed about, but no one was in it; he, therefore passed onwards, and cautiously ascended to the great hall of the mansion.

Whilst he paused to look around, he heard voices in an apartment near; and as he was about to introduce himself amongst the speakers, he distinctly heard his own name pronounced. He therefore thought it no degradation to stop and ascertain so much of the purport of the dialogue as related to his own person; besides, he had introduced himself, he considered, into the enemy's camp, and stratagem was all fair in war. He was determined to proceed with

something more of caution, since he had so far prospered in his exploratory movements.

"Monsieur Ratcliffe," he heard, in the accent of a foreigner, "may yet turn up, Monsieur Levison. I think you are too hasty in your movements. According to your own account, Monsieur Blount cannot last much longer. Food, you say, is bad for his complaint. That is a bad sign, *mon ami*, an empty sack can't stand. If the Englishman no eat, he most die; what more you have, Sare?—*Non!* I shall set my face against rough measure; 'tis dangerous, and may be discovered."

"I do not agree with you, Count," returned the second speaker; "for our own sakes, we must make all sure: since the old dotard signed the will in our favour, I have kept him close. This Ratcliffe, too, I have traced all through his miserable career. He was wrecked, I tell you. My informant writes me from St. Sebastian; not a soul escaped but one passenger, a lady! There are many reasons why this business should be brought to a termination to-night. I have removed every domestic, and given you a fair field, Count. 'Tis yourself must do the deed—that, you know, is part of our contract. Hark!" he said, pausing, what noise was that in the

hall. I thought I heard a footstep. Mein Got, Count, get up and look."

The Count arose from his seat; and smiling at his companion's face of alarm, he took the candle, and throwing open the door, without stepping into the hall, held the taper aloft, and took a careless look into the gloomy recesses of the vast apartment.

"It is noting my friend," he said, "but the thunder that disturb you, and the old man groaning up stairs. Why not," he said, resuming his seat, "why not settle this business yourself, Monsieur Levison; I not like the job."

"I cannot do it, Count," returned the other.

"Ah! you are afraid, Monsieur Anglais."

"I have not been a soldier like yourself, Count. I am afraid; I cannot look on blood."

"Bah! what stuff!" said the Count; "you rob the old gentleman; you get all his moneys; you make him sign de will for you; you get him down to my château, and lock him up, and try to starve him to death; and yet you cannot give him the *coup de grace*."

"You forget to add, Count, that I am to give you your share; and also—"

"*Bien*, I remember dat; and my Lady Blount is to be Countess Roussillon, to reward

me wid her fair hand—good. Where does he lie?”

In the chamber on the right, when you reach the corridor ; the key hangs above the door. I repeat, it *must* be done, Count, and to-night : psha ! 'tis but to pluck the pillow from beneath his head.”

“ And the Lady Blount,” said the Count, “ eh ?”

“ She is, as you know, only too anxious to become Countess Roussillon. You are to settle the estate upon her. The papers are all drawn, and nothing awaits us but the old man’s death.”

“ And you are afraid to strike the blow, Monsieur Anglais ?”

“ I am,” returned the other, “ I confess it ; and you also.”

“ Me, Sare ?” said the Count, sternly, “ me afraid, *sacré !* I am *soldat français*, Monsieur. I serve in the Revolution ; in the grand army, at Marengo, at Austerlitz, in Egypt. *Eh bien !* Sare, in Spain, in Portugal—I chase your cursed nation to Corunna. Afraid, Sare ?—*Non !* I hate your cursed nation ; my *grand* curse upon it ! The *affaire* is *finie*. The old man dies !—*allons donc*, show me the chamber !”

The traveller staid to hear no more. He

stepped noiselessly across the hall; and guided by the glimmering lamp which burned above the staircase, he cautiously and noiselessly ascended the stairs, unlocked the door he had heard described, and entered the chamber. It was a spacious apartment: a lamp stood upon the table, and a heavy-looking bedstead, antique and faded as the tapestry with which the room was hung, stood with hearse-like grandeur at the further end.

Seizing the lamp from the table, the soldier approached the bed, drew aside the curtains, and gazed upon its occupant. Wasted and attenuated, with a beard of a month's growth upon his visage, his father lay sleeping before him.

He had scarcely time to set down his lamp, and conceal himself amongst the dark furniture on one side the bed, when he heard the approaching footsteps of the assassin. The Count appeared surprised at finding the key in the door, instead of hanging withoutside. He however supposed that his nervous comrade had forgotten it in his last visit, and cautiously entered. After raising the candle, and carefully examining the countenance of the sleeper, he glanced round the room, set the lamp again upon the table, drew a long American bowie-

knife, from the breast of his coat, and stepped beside the bed.

"Ah!" he said, as he again regarded the sleeper, and felt its point, "'tis not necessary."

Plucking the cushion from the chair beside the bed, he laid the knife in its place, and again approached it.

The soldier had time meanwhile, from his place of concealment, to observe the assassin narrowly. He was an athletic-looking figure, more than six feet in height, dressed in a military frock coat, padded out in front like the breast of a pouting pigeon, and he wore large moustaches upon his upper lip, which descended over his mouth like a portcullis.

The next moment, after poising the pillow on high with both hands, the Frenchman made a quick step towards the bed, and was about to throw himself upon the sleeper, when he was caught midway by the throat, by a gripe as if a vice had closed upon his windpipe; and with eyes starting from their sockets, he was borne backwards along the apartment, and held firmly against the wall.

For a moment the Count was paralyzed, as with blackened and swollen face he glared upon the infuriated assailant who thus pinned his head against the wainscot. The next minute he

made the most tremendous efforts to free himself. It was, however, in vain that he struggled; his capturer held him with the strength and resolution of a raging madman; and then drawing him from the wall, half-choked, he hurled him to the ground, and fractured his skull with one blow of the oaken towel he held in his right hand.

The reader has, doubtless, by this time surmised that the disbanded soldier, and our old friend, Ratcliffe Blount, were one and the same person. His uncompromising and resolute disposition had, for once, stood him in good stead. He had arrived in the nick of time, caught his enemies red-handed and in the fact, and saved his parent from a violent death. Having thus summarily dealt with the French Count, he kicked him out of his path, with as little remorse as if he had been a bundle of foul clothes, and turned his attention to the intended victim.

Awakened from his slumbers by the sudden conflict, the old gentleman had raised himself in his bed to behold the deadly and violent struggle taking place in his apartment; and having been the horrified spectator of its termination, he now saw the tall form of the soldier approach

him with the intent, as he supposed, to finish the affair by his murder.

Almost helpless, and at the mercy of the fiends who had for some weeks made him a close prisoner in his apartment, coerced him into signing various documents in their favour, and for the last few days, even kept him without food, he had for some time lain in expectation of being even more summarily dealt with. It is not surprizing, therefore, that he now thought the dark hour had arrived.

His wife, who had for two years led him a life of misery, in comparison to which slavery at the galleys would have been pastime, had for the last three months been residing at the Hôtel Roussillon in Paris, having turned her sick husband over to the tender mercies of his respected Jew father-in-law.

When therefore the old gentleman beheld an athletic figure, in the garb of a common soldier, after the violent contest we have described, advancing towards him, he naturally looked upon himself as the bone of contention.

"The infernal scoundrels," he said, "cannot even agree in their villany. They have quarrelled about the spoil, before they have cut the victim's throat!"

With more agility than could have been ex-

pected from one so emaciated, he leaped to his feet upon the floor. The knife which the Count had dropped upon the chair, beside the bed, caught his eye as he did so. Sick and weak as he was, the old gentleman possessed the courage of a lion ; and with the sudden strength of despair, he seized the knife, and opposed himself to his supposed assailant.

The soldier was about to drop upon one knee before his father ; when the latter hindered the movement by throwing himself upon him, and burying the knife in his son's bosom.

Ratcliffe Blount made no effort to ward off the blow, and fell heavily to the ground ; whilst his father, exhausted by the effort he had made, also reeled and fell.

At this moment, a stealthy step ascended the stairs, the door was cautiously opened, and the Asiatic visage of Mr. Levison was thrust into the apartment. Holding the light he carried on high, for some time he gazed into the room, with a countenance of terror and amazement ; till, finding the occupants of the apartment apparently *hors de combat*, he ventured, with stealthy pace, to enter. After walking upon tip-toe a few steps, he stooped and gazed

into the face of his late ally, and then came to the right about as hastily as if he feared that the assailant, who had thus strangely cut off his companion, was at hand to confer upon him a similar favour. Approaching, next, the prostrate form of the soldier, he thrust the light into his face, and recognized him.

"Ha!" said he, quickly, "Ratcliffe Blount! —and slain, too! No, no: mein Got, he breathes! The squire dead, too!" he continued, starting up and approaching the bed. "This is strange. But stay, it may be made much of: yes; however this has come about, it makes me secure."

Glancing round, he possessed himself of the fatal knife which lay beside the bodies; and raising it on high, was about to sheath it in the heart of the youth, when, at that moment, the sharp crack of a postillion's whip was heard beneath the casement.

"Hillo, ho, ho!" cried a voice at the same time; "within, there; what, ho! House, I say! Signor Brabantio, ho!"

A violent knocking also now shook the fore-door of the mansion; and the bell was assailed by a jerk, that tore it from its fastenings.

The Jew leaped to his feet, at the sound,

threw the knife to the farther end of the room, seized upon his lamp, threw open the chamber door, and rushing down the stairs, fled from the scene, along the passage by which Ratcliffe Blount had entered.

He had nearly gained the exterior, when he was met by the person who had clamoured for admittance; and who, unable to gain an entrance at the fore-door, had also essayed the rear of the building, and the two ran full butt against each other.

The thief thinks every bush an officer, it is said; and accordingly, the Jew made as violent an effort to pass out, as the traveller seemed determined to get into the house.

"Halloo! there, my master," said the traveller, keeping his opponent back by main strength; "after all this delay at the front door, you seem in a vast hurry to attend us at the rear of your dwelling. Is this your country manners, comrade, that you knock folks down when they come for assistance, eh? Here's a carriage broken down in your filthy lane, without the gates, stuck fast in the sand, with a party of ladies nearly frozen to death. I want assistance, man; or at least information where I am to seek it."

"In h—l, if you like," said the Jew ; " for you'll get none here from me."

In saying this, the Jew made another effort to rush past, and the traveller immediately knocked him down with the heavy butt of his riding whip, and entered the mansion.

CHAPTER VIII.

Now is Cupid a child of conscience,
He makes restitution.

SHAKSPERE.

IN the last chapter, we have seen two most opportune arrivals. The first comer was our unlucky acquaintance, Ratchliffe Blount; and the document from whence these circumstances have been gleaned, goes on further to state that the second unceremonious personage, who, after clamouring for admittance, forced his way into the interior of the château, was no other than his friend, Altamont de Montdidier.

To account for his presence at this moment, it is sufficient to state, that having succeeded in crossing the Pyrenees with his fair charge, disguised as Spanish muleteers, he found it necessary to make a halt at Bayonne, in order to recruit her somewhat bated strength, and finding the church property he had thus

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appropriated to himself, like Macbeth's murders, "sticking on his hands," the fun of the adventure, also, having given place to reflection and consideration for the situation of his companion, he thought proper to marry her.

Whilst at Bayonne, he fell in with an English lady of rank, who had also just crossed the Pyrenees from Spain, and who, accompanied by her daughter, was endeavouring to make her way through France. Being without an escort, and rather choleric withal, she had been considerably annoyed during the journey; and our friend de Montdidier instantly offered his services, joined their party, and, after a fashion sometimes practised by English gentlemen when travelling on the continent, he encased himself in jack-boots and a short-tailed jacket, and rode courier to his own carriage.

It was, then, on the night we have described, that, overtaken by the storm, in passing towards Caen, the self-constituted courier mistook his road, and the carriage having broken down in the deep ruts of the sandy lane leading to the Château Roussillon, he had ridden forward, dismounted from his steed, and making his way to the "lone chartereux," arrived at the very critical moment.

After he had overturned the wandering Jew, as we have described, and made good his entrance, rambling all over the lower regions without being able to find a soul to answer his shouts and outcries, ascending to the great hall, he continued his clamours.

“Poor house that keeps thyself,” said he, pushing open the door of the room where the Count and Monsieur Levison had held their diabolical committee. “Ho!—Who’s here?”

If any thing that’s civil, speak; if savage, Take or lend. What ho! no answer? then I’ll enter.”

Here he found the remains of a goodly supper upon the table, a flask or two of champagne, a most inviting Périgord pie, a boar’s head, big enough for the sign in Eastcheap, and half-a-dozen delicacies besides.

After refreshing himself with a glass of the champagne, which stood so invitingly upon the table, he resolved to proceed further in his search, and straightway walked up stairs, with the intent of arousing the sleeping family; and arriving at the corridor, kicked open the door of the first apartment he came to.

Here he met with a sight, at which even his firm nerves were shaken; and starting back, more quickly than he had entered, he stood

transfixed at the spectacle which presented itself.

Three prostrate bodies were upon the floor, the polished oak of which was crimsoned with the tide in which they lay. The gloom of the apartment, dimly lighted by the one solitary lamp which stood flickering upon the table, together with the deserted look of the building into which he had intruded, and which seemed only tenanted by the dead, quite overawed him; after gazing for a few minutes upon the sight before him, he felt inclined to turn about, and taking a flying leap down the great staircase by which he had just ascended, he ran out of the house as fast as he was able. As he continued, however, to gaze upon the bodies, he thought he beheld one of them move; the next moment, a deep groan was uttered, and then a hand was raised a few inches, and dropped heavily upon the floor.

Stepping into the room, at the same time grasping his heavy hunting-whip in his hand, he looked around, raised the candle from the table, and stooping down, peered into the face of the person who had thus shown signs of life. It was a man in the garb of a common soldier—his friend, Ratcliffe Blount!

Forgetting all his former fears, he set down

the candle, raised him in his arms, took the flask of brandy from the pocket of his courier's jacket, and poured half the contents down the wounded man's throat. In fine, he succeeded in restoring his friend once more to life, and binding up his wounds, proceeded then to examine the state of the old gentleman who lay beside him; and he had the satisfaction, in a short time, of seeing both his patients in a somewhat better and more hopeful condition than he had found them in.

The wound which Ratcliffe Blount had received, was a severe and dangerous one; and, had the old gentleman possessed a trifle more strength, it would, doubtless, have been instantly mortal. As it was, the coming of his friend, Altamont de Montdidier, who was no contemptible surgeon, and who succeeded in staunching the blood, saved him. Sir Blount, too, as the Frenchman termed the father, he also had the happiness of restoring to his senses, by the aid of the same panacea he had administered to the son, namely, a draught from his flask of *eau de vie*. The Frenchman, however, puzzled him the most.

"This fellow," said he, "is peppered for this world, at all events. I think I see the sign-manual of my friend here," he continued, turning him over, and gazing upon his face; and

then regarding the cudgel which lay beside him, he said, "And I, moreover, Monsieur, suspect 'most foully did you play' for what you have gotten."

After returning to his belated party without, and guiding them through mud and mire to the château, which, without informing them of the events which had taken place, he hinted belonged to a friend of his own, he proceeded to do the honours of the mansion, setting the servants who had accompanied the travellers, to work to make a glorious wood-fire upon the hearth, and serve out the refreshments the ladies stood so much in need of.

"Here, your Grace," said he to the portly-looking personage, who, enveloped in furs, spread her extended palms over the grateful blaze of the crackling logs. "Here, your Grace, are the remains of a goodly supper, which the knave butler has, doubtless, been too idle to clear away. I entreat you, in the name of my friend, to do justice to the viands, after having so long been frozen in yonder inhospitable lane. Lady de Clifford," he continued, "follow Mistress de Montdidier's example; after a glass of champagne, you see, she is already deeply engaged in discussing the merits of that *pâté de foie gras*."

In short, Altamont not only managed to play the host to his fellow travellers, arranging mat-

ters for their accommodation during the night, stabling their horses, and aiding them in every possible way ; he also contrived, soon after dawn, to procure the assistance of a surgeon for his friend, he himself attending to both the invalids during the intervals which he could devote to them. Indeed it was not till the next morning, through some *contre-temps*, or the prying curiosity of the chattering grisette, her maid, that her Grace of Hurricane discovered, to her astonishment, that the reason the host of the château had not made his appearance, was because he was unable, from illness, so to do ; that his son also lay dangerously wounded in the chamber next to the one she herself had slept in, that Château Roussillon was the name of the mansion in which she had found a refuge, and that she was under obligation, for the hospitality of the said Château Roussillon, to the father of her eternal enemy, Ratcliffe Blount.

This was rather a disagreeable interruption to the harmony of the breakfast party ; and Altamont de Montdidier, who had been suddenly called out of the room to his friend, whose wound had broken out afresh, returned to find the Duchess with eyes extended, and no pleasant expression of countenance, listening in

amazement to the story her maid had heard from Claude Maralli, the chasseur, who had gathered it from Pierre, the postillion, that *Sir* Blount had been shot through the head last night by a gang of robbers ; and that his son, who had returned from the wars, had been nearly killed by the same ball, whilst the Count Roussillon himself was actually, at that moment, lying dead in the tapestried chamber above them.

"Mr. de Mont-di-dier," said her Grace, with deliberation, "I am greatly obliged by your exertions in our favour here, and the refuge you have procured us ; but, Sir, I fear, in the present distressing circumstances of this family, we are greatly intruding. Will you, therefore, do me the favour to order my carriage round as soon as possible, that we may proceed onwards to Caen without delay."

"It is quite unnecessary, 'Lady Hurricane,'" returned Altamont. "So far from our presence here being an intrusion, my friend would be delighted if we spent the Christmas here. Besides which, I cannot, at the present moment, leave the château, till I am assured of our hosts being out of danger."

"But I can, Sir," returned the Duchess, drawing herself up ; "and having particular reasons why I wish to reach Caen early, I must

insist upon setting out forthwith. Carlostein," said she to the attending servant, "order the carriage out at once."

"It is impossible, Lady Hurricane," returned Altamont; "perfectly impossible, I assure you."

"Impossible! Sir," returned the Duchess, "how impossible?"

"Because I, this morning, lighted the kitchen fire with one of the hind wheels," said Altamont, turning off. "There was no wood cut in the château; the snow is a foot and a half deep without doors, and no water was boiled for breakfast."

* * * * *

The winter of the year 183—, was a particularly severe one. The snow in the gardens of Chateau Roussillon was on a level with the hedge, whilst the park and open country around, in many places, also lay enrobed four or five feet deep in the same white garment.

Then icicles hung by the wall;
And milk came frozen home in pail;
Then blood was nipped, and ways were foul,
And nightly sung the staring owl
To-who:
Tu-whit, to-who, a merry note,
While Greasy Joan did keel the pot.

Christmas day, on that same year, was kept at Chateau Roussillon, in the regular *Old English style*. The party, 'tis true, was but small; but as they sat and feasted in the great hall of the château, looking down from the elevated position they occupied, upon the assembled domestics and dependants, who seated at a lower board discussed the roast beef, turkeys, plum-puddings, and minced pies, set before them, it was altogether a scene of hospitality, such as had not been witnessed in that mansion, at that festive season, for the last half century, at the least.

As soon as the tables were drawn, and the ladies had sipped their coffee in the withdrawing room, Altamont de Montdidier commenced organizing a little dance amongst the domestics, himself leading off with the Duchess of Hurricane, in order to set the thing going with proper spirit.

Ratchiffe Blount, meanwhile, was seated beneath the ample chimney-piece, holding converse sweet, and whispering a flattering tale in the ear of Lady de Clifford. He was still pallid from the effects of his wound which, but for the unremitting care and attention bestowed upon him night and day, during the fever which had supervened, a care such

as only the affection of woman can bestow, would have doubtless proved fatal.

On the other side of the hearth sat his respected sire, and the black-eyed bride of Altamont de Montdidier. As the old gentleman watched the pallid features of the returned prodigal, and blessed his own stars that he had been spared the dreadful retaliation he had so nearly inflicted upon the child who came to save; improved too in health and strength, by the load of care that coming had relieved him from, as he listened to the cheerful sound of the French horn and tabor within the hall, contrasted with the violence of the storm without, he experienced a greater share of happiness than he had known for years.

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The history of Ratcliffe Blount, now necessarily draws to a conclusion. Indeed all further circumstances connected with his subsequent fate we might, perhaps, never have had an opportunity of presenting to our readers, but from the perusal of a letter received by Lieutenant Snaffle, from Major Sabretash. The latter officer had been dedicating a twelvemonth's leave of absence to foreign travel, and whilst viewing the wonders of the world abroad, had fallen in with one or two of the *dramatis personæ*, who have figured in the foregoing tale.

It happened that Lieutenant Snaffle, (by the way, he was now at the top of the list of Lieutenants, with money lodged for the purchase of his troop), chanced, whilst in the Emerald Isle, again to fall in with Captain Plume, and the meeting naturally leading them to recur to the subject of the curious manuscript they had perused in the cabaret at Ballyoflaherty, Lieutenant Snaffle offered to gratify the curiosity of his friend by reading part of the epistle he had received from Sabretash, a few days before. We therefore give the extract to our readers exactly as the Lieutenant gave it to Captain Plume.

MAJOR SABRETASH TO LIEUTENANT SNAFFLE.

“ It is so long, my dear Snaffle, since I have had the favour of a line from you, that I am surprised at my own forgiving disposition, in condescending to write again. Not a bit of news have you given me since the —th Hussars left Canterbury, at least three months ago. Were I, indeed, to treat you according to your deserts, I should abandon so dilatory a correspondent; but, in truth, I have news of these parts, which I think likely to interest you. Ah, my dear fellow, Paris, and Naples, and Vienna, are all very well, but I sigh for those delightful scenes in which we were actors, during the last

season in London. By the way, I have made use of my introductions, here at Vienna, and become acquainted with some splendid specimens of female excellence, as various in style as the portraits which adorn the walls of the gorgeous palaces they dwell in. The Princess of Schloss Johannisberger, for instance, is a perfect specimen of the Rubens' school. The Baroness Altenberg, again, is as dreamy-looking and lovely as her own Titian. Madame Vandenhenden might have sat for the spouse of Vandyke; whilst the Duchess of Landsdorfhausen is exactly like the portrait of good Queen Bess, by Hans Holbein. But to see them all waltz, my dear Snaffle, would be a year away from your life.

"There is, however, a something wanting about these foreign beauties, which I am at a loss exactly to define. They fall short, very short, of our own swan-like and peerless dames of Britain, such, for instance as a N——n, a S——d, or a Sey——r, with intellect throned in beauty. By the by, I was much struck with an English lady of title, whom I saw, the other night, at the Grand Duke's ball. The intelligence that rested upon her noble forehead, the delicately but proudly formed nose, the chiselled lip, that never parted but to show the pearly teeth within, altogether, made me desirous of

gaining a nearer view of this fair creature, as she whirled along in the maze of the waltz. In doing so, I was induced to notice the cavalier whose arm she sought after the dance was over. Judge of my surprise, when in the splendid regimental of an officer of Austrian Hussars, I recognized our friend, Ratcliffe Blount.

“After the first greetings were passed, he introduced me to the lady whose beauty had so struck me, the daughter of the Duchess of Hurricane, now Lady Constance Blount. His wars, he said, were now over. He had been married six months, and intended to reside some years abroad. As I continued on terms of intimacy with them during my short stay at Vienna, I learned many things appertaining to his history, some of which will, I dare say, surprise you. Amongst other matters, he informed me that Wharncliffe Grange was being rebuilt, some coal mines having been discovered on the estate, which had increased the value of the property at least a couple of hundred thousand pounds. The Levison party were at length dispersed and discomfited. The elder Israelite, after making his way to Paris, and informing his daughter of their intrigues being all blown, fled to America, in order to save himself from transportation. Mrs. Blount senior soon afterwards eloped to the same land

of freedom, in company with Captain Catchflat, carrying with her all the property she had succeeded in scraping together, and her infant. The young cub being completely left in the lurch, turned bonnet to a hell, in Paris; in which capacity he might, perhaps, have thriven, but for the impertinence of your old acquaintance, Captain de Montdidier. That most eccentric of individuals accompanied Lords Hardenbrass and Cœur de Lion, one night, to a hell, in the Rue Rivoli, carrying with them a sack-full of Napoleons, in order to break the bank. They would, no doubt, have succeeded, but for the circumstance of a row taking place during the play, and the Frenchmen showing fight. The two noblemen being unknown, de Montdidier persuaded young Levison to tweak Lord Hardenbrass by the nose; whilst Lieutenant Bullyman, who was also amongst the players, attempted to confer the same favour upon his companion. The consequence was easily to be conceived. Young Levison got so tremendous a thrashing, that he has never recovered it. Mr. Bullyman suffered a similar martyrdom at the hands of Lord Cœur de Lion; and the whole party were arrested, and carried off to the guard-house.

“ And now, my dear fellow, I think I

have given you all the news that will interest you. Yet, stay, there are yet one or two of your friends I have not mentioned. Lady Hardenbrass, whom you remember as Miss Villeroy, has, I hear, been for some time separated from her husband; difference of temper is the alleged cause, she having turned Puseyite. Mrs. Allworthy still continues to spend half the year in foreign travel, and is expected shortly on a visit to Lady Blount, at Vienna. But the most extraordinary thing of all is that Altamont de Montdidier, to whose society the Duchess of Hurricane took a great fancy, before the party broke up at Château Rousillon, managed to make up a match between her Grace and the elder Blount; and as the old gentleman still continued a great invalid, and both were rather warm in temper, he dispatched them off to Grafenberg, in Silesia, to the care of Vincent Presnitz, to undergo the cold water cure."

MURDAKE HALL,

A WARWICKSHIRE LEGEND.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

The image of a murder done in Vienna.
Gonzago is the Duke's name, his wife Baptista. You
Shall see anon ; 'tis a knavish piece of work.

SHAKSPERE.

MOST of our readers will remember the outward favour of many buildings of the time of bluff King Harry the Eighth. In fertile Warwickshire they are frequently to be stumbled upon during a ramble through the ruralities of that interesting and delicious country.

Let us call to remembrance, then, an ancient dwelling belonging to a family of condition of

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the times of the Tudors. A dilapidated gateway gives entrance to the domain, through which you gaze down the dark and melancholy avenue upon the ample windows of the noble looking mansion at its extremity, and which leafy tunnel displays the iron-grey, monastic-looking edifice, as though it was some Flemish painting seen through an artist's tube.

On a closer view we behold the rampant animals upon each crumbling pillar of the noble gateway; and then, to relieve the eye, glance at the rich verdure of the mossy carpet, darkened down and overshadowed as it is by the wide-spreading trees of the avenue.

Our attention is then drawn to the curious and elaborately carved balcony over each window of the building; to the various shields and coats of arms, the grinning and distorted faces, and the cunning workmanship everywhere displayed on its frontispiece, together with those high and massive twisted chimneys, so peculiar to the eccentric edifices of that age, and which seem to shoot up like horns from every part of the roof of the buildings.

Utter melancholy and silence reign around the long deserted scene where so many generations of the (sometime) family, so long its proprietors, kept up a noble hospitality; nay, perhaps, many other races have succeeded in possession, have died there, and are forgotten.

As we loiter around the now empty and shattered building, and look up at its curious balconies and clustered chimneys, or peer through the ample windows into the gloomy recesses of its apartments, which stately dames, knightly gentlemen, lovely daughters, and gallant sons, have been wont to grace, filling the glades, and walks, and gardens around, with sounds of mirth, and life, and jollity, we wonder, and grow sad as we think how short-lived their aspirations after fame and fortune! As we reflect on the futility of their loves and hates, their jealousies and fears, their fierce contentions and their deadly feuds, how vain and ridiculous life itself appears, when not a single heir remains to inherit their vast possessions. The old shell of their once proud habitation seems to stand alone, a melancholy and mouldering mausoleum, to tell the tale of their sojourn upon the earth; nay, per-

haps, the very walls they reared, together with the domains of their ancestry, thus outliving their race, have become the property of their bitterest foes.

CHAPTER II.

MURDAKE HALL.—THE FAMILY OF THE
MURDAKES.

The place that once knew them
Knows them no more.

SCOTT.

MURDAKE HALL was a vast untenanted and half ruinous mansion in my school-days. Like Cumnor, its neighbourhood was a spot deserted by the country people around; they “avoided its ancient moss-grown walls.” Some “withered murder,” so strange and so unnatural as to have been handed down for more than two centuries from sire to son in the adjoining village, had given it an evil reputation; whilst the tourist or wayfarer seldom stumbled upon its solitude in their rambles through this part of the world. The mansion was so remote from any frequented road, and so completely embosomed in the thick woods around, that it

was rarely intruded on by either gentle or simple.

I loved its melancholy and deserted neighbourhood. There was an inexpressible charm in its old world look, and in the dark, shadowy, and ghost-like haunts around. The long dank grass which grew in its forsaken courts, and the unpruned shrubs and neglected trees of its gardens and pleasure-grounds, which completely hid the walks with their encroaching boughs, were to me more interesting than the most elegant and well-trimmed parterre in the kingdom.

Often, when other lads spent their half-holidays in playing at cricket upon the adjacent common, I would steal away, and loiter till night-fall about the woods, and wander through the gloomy apartments of Murdake Hall.

There were sundry legends too, connected with the old place, which I felt considerable delight in hunting after and connecting together, in order to make out something like a connected history of the former possessors of this domain.

Sir Clinton Murdake was a gentleman of ancient family in the county of Warwick. On the domain allotted to his ancestor by the Conqueror, for the use of his good sword at Hastings, this same Sir Clinton, in the earlier

part of Harry the Eighth's reign, erected Murdake Hall.

The Murdakes had hitherto, from the period of their ancestor's successful adventure with Duke William of Normandy, been an honourable, a gallant, and fortunate race. The sons ever foremost in the listed and tented fields, and the daughters lovely as they were virtuous.

The Crusades, however, and the White and Red Rose wars, together with those constant contests in the "vasty fields of France," had rather used them up; and lastly, entering heartily in the cause of the unfortunate Charles Stuart, they completely ruined their fortunes, so that the great grandson of the erector of the above-named mansion, a soldier of fortune, with nothing but his good sword to feed and clothe him, was serving as a colonel of cuirassiers, under the Great Gustavus Adolphus, just before the period in which the events about to be narrated in this veritable history are said to have taken place.

A run of ill luck will sometimes pursue a family as steadily for a time in the game of life, as it is not unfrequently seen to do in games of chance. Accordingly, Sir Clinton Murdake, after amusing his leisure hours in the erection of the magnificent pile which half ruined him in completing, fin-

ished the farce of overhousing himself by going to the other extreme, by unhousing himself altogether.

Like many others of the English gentry of that period, he broke his back by laying his manor on it, (as Shakspeare has it), and sold his estate to furnish forth himself and numerous followers to the "field of the cloth of gold, 'twixt Guynes and Ard."

Sir Clinton, then, and his retinue, "glittering in golden coats like images," were amongst the most brilliant of that gallant assemblage, where, indeed, "every man that stood, showed like a mine;" and the good knight, after that view of earthly glory was over, had the poor satisfaction of returning to the neighbourhood of his sometime home so much involved in difficulties, that, like many others, who with equal folly and extravagance had sickened their estates in the same cause, he was obliged to sell Murdake Hall, its parks, and walks, and manors, which having become the property of another, he settled upon a small estate which yet remained to him, and broke his heart in unavailing regrets at the sacrifice he had made, in order to perform his part well and chivalrously, in the vanities of the passage of arms in France.

This was the first commencement of the

family downfall. It is truly observed, that sorrows seldom come but in thick succession : so it was with the Murdakes, till, as I have said, the old mansion, after changing ownership half-a-dozen times, at the period of our story became the property of a miserly old hunk, who with his only son was then residing there. This man, whose name was Hugh Hubald, having realized, by mercantile and other transactions, a splendid fortune, emigrated from the neighbourhood of Wapping, and set up for a fine gentleman in Warwickshire ; having purchased Murdake Hall, some half-a-dozen years before, for about a quarter its value.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW FAMILY—A SUCCESSFUL RIVAL.

Oh hell! to choose love by another's eye.

SHAKSPERE.

OLD HUBALD, whose constant care "was to increase (and, at any rate, to hold fast) his store," had but one child; and his wife having been dead many years, his great wish was to perpetuate his name, and leave his vast property to this youth. Accordingly, he cast about, after fairly settling down as a country squire, in order to find some young' lady, of gentle blood, in the neighbourhood he had thus chosen for his residence, as a fitting wife for the young heir.

It is easy to conceive, that those families of distinction who had been on terms of intimacy with the knightly Murdakes, would scarcely feel much pleasure in the society of the Hubalds,

father and son, who, with all their wealth (which they knew not how to spend like gentlemen), totally failed in carrying themselves with any degree of proper feeling or spirit, in the position their property had enabled them to attain.

The old gentleman, although professing to be fond of the sports of the field, scarcely knew a hawk from a handsaw. His kennels and his stalls were as empty as his money-bags were full; and the tower, which had formerly been tenanted by falcons, was now neglected, empty, and half ruinous, and had become the haunt of the owl and the jackdaw. The hunting-stables were also in a dilapidated condition; and the mansion itself and its various courts and offices, which, in the prosperous days of the gallant Murdakes and their successors, had echoed back the hark and whoop, and wild halloo of the huntsman and his attendant throng, and resounded with the yelp and cry of hounds and neigh of steeds, was now almost as melancholy-looking and dull as some "lone Chartreux."

The old gentleman would spend nearly half his time in pottering about his gardens, or fingering over and counting his rose-nobles; occasionally varying the amusement by sallying

forth, upon a half-starved steed, to look after a hare in the park, accompanied by a brace of hungry-looking greyhounds, and an old withered serving-man, as gaunt as his master. The son, who in conceit and silliness might have been first cousin to cousin Slender himself, got through the best part of his time in the bar of the little hostel of the neighbouring village, either playing at all-fours with mine host of the Checquers, or fuddling his weak brain with cups of canary and sack ; occasionally eyeing, like Dumbiedikes, the active movements of a buxom female, who, fresh as an April morn, and strong as porter, officiated as a sort of drawer and attendant upon those good fellows, who condescended to halt and call for refreshment at the only house of entertainment for man and beast in the village of Abbots Wickford. So that, when Old Hubald had cast an eye upon one or two of the daughters of those few country gentlemen in his immediate neighbourhood with whom business or accident brought him in contact, he was made sufficiently sensible of his son's utter unfitness to make a successful suit to them, even backed up, as he intended his offer should be, by a decent accompaniment of fertile acres.

This, together with the circumstance of the ill success which had attended all his efforts in persuading his son to give up his circle of acquaintance at the Checquers, and present himself to "the fair eyes and gentle wishes" of some of the neighbouring nymphs in the county, to whom he could then have procured him an introduction, and a hint he had also received of the attractive graces of the buxom barmaid, made the crafty old gentleman resolve to try his luck further a-field, and treat in the matter by deputy.

Accordingly he indited an epistle to a friend in Cheshire, desiring him to look around his neighbourhood for some gentleman of that county, who would be willing to bestow one of his daughters upon a youth who wrote himself Esquire in the middle of England, with five thousand pounds in his pocket, and Murdake Manor in anticipation.

In due time, this epistle was answered. The ferret-eyed and dapper little confidential clerk of Giles Goosequill himself, the crafty lawyer of Sandbach in Cheshire, accoutred in ponderous jackboots for the nonce, and elevated upon a strong-jointed, long-tailed, Flemish-built hackney, conveyed, with infinite care, and some slight danger, some six or seven days after the date thereof,

the thrice-enveloped, and many-sealed rejoinder. Master Goosequill informed his employer, that he had a client, residing at Muckslush Hall, near Congleton, a gentleman of a goodly presence and a genteel family; that he was the father of several handsome daughters; and provided Master Hubald was but content to look over the circumstance of their beauty and their gentility being their only portion, he had no doubt, if Master Stephen could be persuaded to make an excursion into Cheshire, and would favour him with a visit, that he would be in love with the whole family, and might choose for a wife whichever of the young ladies he considered most to his taste. The letter of the lawyer ended with the hint, that of course he expected to have the drawing up the marriage settlements, &c., and something handsome also, for bringing the matter to a successful issue, after paving the way for the introduction of his son.

Old Hubald, on receipt of this packet, distrusting his son's achievement of the adventure and the maid, unassisted, determined to chaperone him in the expedition. Accordingly, father and son, accompanied by the attorney's clerk, and attended by a couple of serving men, in their Sunday doublets, and armed to the teeth,

mounted their steeds, and next morning, set forth on their expedition into Cheshire, and arrived, without any material hindrance or adventure, at the town of Sandbach.

Here the old man contrived with the attorney to get himself presented to Squire d'Arbercourt, one market day, when that gentleman had ridden into the town to look upon a yoke of oxen, and at the same time consult with Master Goosequill upon matters appertaining to his somewhat involved affairs ; then over a cup of claret and a cold capon, at lunch with the Cheshire squire, he introduced his hopeful son, and the subject next his heart.

In fine, Squire d'Arbercourt, a good, honest, sporting, country gentleman, whose whole soul was in his dogs, his horses, and his hawks, and whose taste therein, together with the consequent round of joviality which such pursuits led him into, had considerably involved his affairs, caught at the idea of so good a match for one of his daughters, and saw no objection, provided the youngsters liked each other, that Master Stephen should take to wife his eldest girl, Dorothea.

In fact, he shut his eye to the want of descent in the son-in-law offered, and forgot his own Norman shield in the well-filled and hoarded

money bags, so opportunely displayed by old Hubald.

Like Squire Western, he swore in his heart that his beautiful child should marry the fortune, "will she, nill she;" and as for the man who owned it, even had he been an infidel, Jew, or a turbaned Turk, the gold in his purse was sufficient to make an angel of him.

"Come thy ways, lad," said he, "to the Hall to-morrow, and I'll introduce thee to the lass. She'll like thee, I'm sure on't; for thou seemest a modest civil youth, with few words and no oaths in thy mouth; and to speak truth, we've over many of the swash-buckler and rake-helly sort amongst the young men in Cheshire. The fortune you speak of, Master Hubald, is more than I ever expected for Doll, I tell thee fairly; but if the lad and lass can manage to agree, and happen to fancy each other, egad! but we'll shake hands on it, and have a rouse together, whilst the youngsters are billing and cooing."

Accordingly, the invitation being accepted, it was forthwith agreed that old Hubald and his son should next morning ride over and present themselves at breakfast at Muckslush Hall. Squired' Arbercourt, then calling for his horse and his serving-man, drove the spurs into the

steed's sides and galloped home in great glee, to advertise his wife of the unexpected and splendid match thus suddenly offered to his daughter, and at the same time prepare her to receive favourably young Master Stephen, the rich heir of Murdake Hall, as her future spouse.

Unluckily, however, for the success of the young gentleman's suit, a rival sprung up and bore off his bride, before he could win or even see her, smooth as their course of love seemed to have been prepared for them; for Master Stephen, either from feeling no sympathy in the match which thus "stood upon the choice of friends," or from the strong affection he already felt for the buxom barmaid of the Checquers in Abbots Wickford, or perchance from having devoured too many of the cheese-cakes at supper, in Master Goosequill's snug little parlour the night before, found himself so seriously unwell, as not to be able to rise the next morning and pursue his journey to Muckslush Hall. It was, therefore, agreed that his father should take the field, and render an excuse for him; and that, after relieving his pains and aches, the young man should come on so as to make his appearance at Muckslush, somewhere about the dinner hour. Before that

hour arrived, however, young Master Stephen had grown considerably worse, and was under the sharp practice of the leech of Sandbach, for inflammation. His father, meanwhile having arrived at Muckslush Hall, and having been introduced to Miss Dorothea, the toast of the whole country side, was so struck and dumb-founded by her surpassing beauty, that he quite forgot his son's suit, and making a mistake, by no means uncommon in such arrangements, he offered his own hand to the lovely young lady, promising that if she would but accept him, to endow her with three times the sum he had proposed for his son, and Murdake Hall into the bargain.

The fair Dorothea lent no unfavourable ear to this new suitor; she turned the matter over to her sire for his consideration, as by far too grave a subject for her to decide on; and provided her parent considered she was old enough to become the mistress of Murdake, wife of Squire Hubald, and mother of Master Stephen, she had no objection to take upon herself all the responsibility attending those offices. Saying which, the spoiled beauty left the two old gentlemen to dispose of her as they thought best, and calling for her attendant falconer and her palfrey, she took her

hawk upon her wrist, and sallied forth to the marshes to look out for a heron ; whilst her father being but too willing to overlook the disparity of age in this " beauty and beast " contract, the affair was soon arranged, and looked upon as settled.

Young Master Stephen soon afterwards returned homewards, after having been well bled and blistered, to resume his old haunt and occupation in the snug little bar of the Checquers ; and old Hugh Hubald furnished his merry Christmas at Muckslush by making Dorothea d'Arbercourt his true and lawful wife, and carrying her home to solitude and Murdake Hall.

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE AND HATRED.

Crabbed age and youth
Cannot live together.

SHAKSPERE.

FOR the first few weeks after her arrival, the young bride found herself tolerably content and happy in her new abode. There were many little alterations and arrangements for her to make there, and her old husband, who at first absolutely doated upon the lovely girl, allowed her to take her own way in every thing, even becoming almost generous at her suggestion. She had her palfreys, and her dogs; her hawks, and her falconer to attend them; and, in short, she contrived during the first few months of her management, to revive and repeople the Hall; and being for the time absolute mistress of all she surveyed, where all was beautiful, because all

was new, she found herself contented and tolerably happy; teasing young Master Stephen almost to death in the liveliness of her disposition, whilst her joyous laugh as she played him all sorts of mischievous pranks, and hunted him about the apartments and gardens around, made the melancholy looking old ruin ring again. Nay, she almost weaned the youth, by continually tormenting him on the subject, from his old haunt, his flagon, and his mistress, at the Checquers at Abbots Wickford.

Ere long, however, these amusements began to pall, and although she possessed the companionship of a husband in her paradise, she began notwithstanding to feel as discontent and lonely in her new situation of mistress of Murdake, as Amy Robsart is described to have been at the monotony of Cumnor Hall. The whole tenor of her life became irksome to her; she had been accustomed to plenty of society, and a house full of roaring blades, her father's guests; and like Di Vernon, could follow the pack with the best amongst them. Now she had no pack to follow; and if she had, she must have either followed it with strangers, or alone. Old Master Hubald never listened to the cry of the hounds, or loved to feel

the bounding steed ; and as for Master Stephen, he abhorred all kinds of sport as he hated an unfilled can.

Tired, therefore, of pursuing her hawks, and disgusted with her husband's favourite greyhounds, sick to death also of wandering about the parks and gardens of the Hall, she began to pine in thought, and long for something to love and that would interest her ; nay, even something to hate would have been a relief. Her restless spirit began to hunt after new fancies, spite of all her efforts to control the feeling ; she also began to despise the old pantaloons, her husband, and as he gradually became less enamoured and indulgent to her, seeking to curb the freedom and gaiety of her disposition, at last she absolutely disliked him. " Her delicate tenderness began to find itself abused," as the old gentleman relapsed into his accustomed stinginess, and sought to keep her confined to the precincts of the Hall. He suddenly turned jealous and morose too, and she soon disrelished and avoided his society and her home, spending half of her time either immured in the solitude of her own gloomy chamber, or in wandering about alone in the woods and sylvan retreats of the beautiful chace around the Hall.

It happened one lovely afternoon, some five months after she had thus become the wife of Squire Hubald, that as she was wandering near the end of the avenue, which stretched nearly three quarters of a mile from the building, she observed a horseman advancing along the road which crossed its extremity near where she walked. In a few minutes, the rider pulling up his steed beside her, informed her that he had missed his road, and fearing that he was unwillingly intruding upon some person's property, begged the favour of being directed to the village of Abbots Wickford. The young lady, turning round and looking upon the horseman as she answered him, thought she had never beheld so noble a countenance, and so elegant a figure as the rider possessed; and the cavalier was no less struck with the rich and uncommon loveliness of the lady before him. The blood mantled in the cheeks of both as they gazed on each other, and they became confused they knew not wherefore.

The cavalier at length reiterating his question and his apology, the lady recovered herself, dropped her eyes under his ardent gaze, and endeavoured to direct him.

"You should have kept the road before you," said she, "instead of entering the

park-gates. To return now would be tedious. You are welcome to proceed through the park. Turn to the left when you reach the footpath half way down this avenue, and hold it till you gain the ruin in the wood; then take the right-hand road, and it will lead you to the place you seek."

"The way, fair lady," said the youth, smiling, "will, I fear me, be rather hard to hit; and yet these woods and these domains seem familiar to me, as though I had left their neighbourhood but a week ago, rather than a score of years back. Methinks that venerable-looking mansion yonder looks like some building I have often dreamt of when far away in other lands. Some early and shadowy recollection of this spot haunts me as I gaze. May I inquire the name of the person dwelling here?"

Wherefore was it that the lovely mistress of the domain, with whom the youth seemed so struck, blushed as she replied, that "Master Hubald was the present owner of Murdake Hall."

"Hubald," said the youth, musing and gazing around him with renewed interest, "Methought I had heard the De Courcys possessed the estate. This, then, is the seat of my ancestors: this, then, is Murdake Hall! Strange that

memory should cling to a spot which I have not seen since I was six years old. So, then, Squire Hubald resides here ! and you, lady, may I ask if one so lovely is the daughter of the present possessor of the estate ?”

The countenance of the lady again became crimsoned, while she stammered some evasive answer to the question, and her eyes once more dropped beneath the gaze of the gallant-looking stranger, as she thought of her aged and miserly spouse. “ But come !” she added recovering herself, “ let me offer you the hospitality of Murdake. Your horse appears somewhat jaded, and as I *ought* to possess some little influence here, methinks the least I can do is to bid you welcome to rest and refreshment. before you pass the Hall. Turn not to the left, but ride up to the building. I see master Hubald yonder returning with his dogs from coursing, and doubtless he will hope for your company at the evening meal.”

The traveller reined up his horse, and struck him sharply with the spur so as to show his beauty and mettle to advantage.

“ My charger thanks you, lady, for your offer,” said he ; “ for in truth we have journeyed far and fast to-day. Perhaps I may be permitted to escort you to the Hall. In me you behold

one whose family have been not altogether unknown to these domains, though now possessing but small interest in the county. I am Sir Clinton Murdake."

The lady stopped and gazed upon the speaker with renewed interest, since she saw before her the last remaining scion of that knightly race, the exploits of whose ancestry had so frequently been the theme of story in her happy home in Cheshire, and whose sometime estate she was now the mistress of.

In the noble-looking youth beside her, dressed in the becoming garb of a military man of the period, she fancied she beheld the representative of one of those paladins of old she loved to read of in the romances of the time, the only books she ever condescended to peruse, and of which her head was indeed but too full.

Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight ?

The young soldier dismounted ; and, leading his steed by the bridle, walked beside the lady, beneath the shade of those stately trees of the noble-looking avenue, towards the mansion before them.

When two young persons suddenly meet, and as suddenly take a violent fancy for each other,

as the handsome pair now before us are here seen to have done, they quickly learn each other's history.

Sir Clinton Murdake was not long in informing the beautiful woman by his side, in return for the interest she expressed for the family whose estate was now the property of her husband, that he had been high in favour with the great Gustavus Adolphus, and had seen many a hard fought field in his service, having risen to command the regiment of Finland cuirassiers; that he had himself been left for dead on the field of Lutzen, where that hero was killed, but having been found amongst the slain he had recovered of the wounds he received there. His regiment having been dispersed and cut to pieces, he had taken the opportunity of wandering home to visit his native country, and the few acres of land he possessed near the village of Abbots Wickford, before he took service again under some foreign power.

If the young and lovely wife of the owner of Murdake had previously seen reason to repent her having too inconsiderately sacrificed herself to the yellow god, before thus meeting with the young soldier in the avenue, she now awoke to a perfect horror of her situation. She found, indeed, that the vast possessions and riches of her husband

afforded no satisfaction to her, since the society of him she had taken for a husband was never sought after or even tolerated amongst those neighbours whose acquaintance was worth cultivation ; whilst those few precise, puritanical, and soured personages, who had since her marriage shown a disposition to be on terms of acquaintanceship, were in appearance, station and manner, either eminently disagreeable or unworthy of her regard. Now that she found the monotony of her existence relieved by the society of a handsome youth, whose generous, romantic, and chivalrous feelings were so entirely at variance with the sordid, selfish character of her husband, the passions of strong love and violent hate possessed her wholly. The loathing she felt for her husband was only to be equalled by the violence of her love for the gallant-looking soldier she had so recently become acquainted with.

She possessed one of those bold and daring spirits that, once aroused, sets all control and all fear of consequences at defiance. Her love for the young cavalier, who had now for some time been her husband's guest, was coupled with so great a disgust at her present situation and future prospects, that like the

ruffian in Macbeth, she was ready to set her life on any cast, to mend it, or be rid of it.

The high honour and proper feeling of Sir Clinton Murdake would have saved her from all attempts at entanglement in a *liaison*, however much he might have admired her surpassing beauty. Nay, he would fain have fled from the contemplation of an interesting woman allied to an old miser, and living in the solitude of a lonely mansion in the country. Having been from very early youth engaged in active service either in the beleagured city, or the tented field, he had neither "those arts of conversation such as chamberers have," nor had he the inclination to seduce the affections of one whom he considered unfortunate in her situation, and whose freedom of manner appeared to proceed from her very innocence of disposition.

The wily beauty immediately saw this, and laying violent siege to the soldier's heart, determined he should not so easily escape her.

Apollo fled, and Daphne held the chase.

When a woman, and such a woman, is once aroused by adverse circumstances and finds her affections either coldly received or unrequited, she sometimes becomes a demon. Dorothea,

however, had the wit and the art to mask her evil disposition, and the cavalier soon "professed himself her admirer as well as her friend."

It happened that Squire Hubald was just about this time obliged to leave his home on matters of business, connected with some lands he possessed in the neighbourhood of London. It has been observed by a great poet of a later day, that your real husband, although always suspicious, still no less suspects in the wrong place; so it was with the lord and master of Dorothea. He felt himself so complimented with the affability of the well-bred gentleman who had honoured his roof by accepting a temporary home under it, whilst his business lay in that part of the world, that he begged the favour of him to remain until his return from the metropolis, and desired that during his absence he would exercise the authority of a master at Murdake; giving his wife a piece of advice at parting to treat Sir Clinton handsomely, as it would doubtless pay in the end.

"I want his few remaining lands, girl, at my own price. He's a good-natured, openfisted, foolish spendall; I can read him as easily as if I saw through a window in his breast. I've already spoken with him on the subject, and anon I'll tell thee more. Treat him kindly, treat

him kindly; I know more about that piece of land than he ever dreamt of. Farewell, Doll."

The youthful couple were thus left to follow the bent of their own free will. Thrown together with no one to interrupt their course of love, and nothing to control their actions, the consequences may easily be surmised. Sir Clinton Murdake forgot his high feelings of honour, and Dorothea her marriage vow. The hours flew by unheeded. They rode side by side together with the hawks, they spent whole days too upon the tranquil waters of the lake. Like Lorenzo and Jessica, they looked in each other's eyes as the moonlight slept upon some bank of wild thyme and nodding violets, and forgetting, in their present dream of enjoyment, that a time of reckoning or parting must come, they thought of enjoying a day to-morrow as to-day, and of being lovers eternal.

CHAPTER V.

AN INTERRUPTION TO THE COURSE OF
LOVE.

This love will undo us all.

SHAKSPERE.

It was on the morning of the sixth day from Squire Hubald's setting forth that this unhallowed intercourse received a sudden interruption in the person of Master Stephen Hubald, who entered the oak-panelled apartment where Sir Clinton was seated after the morning meal, opposite to his beautiful hostess, striking the chords of her guitar, as an accompaniment to the song he favoured her with, whilst the lady, "with eye and ear attentive bent," fondly regarded the performer. Master Stephen Hubald, without

consideration of the charming melody he thus interrupted, or indeed at all caring for the rudeness of the interruption, bouncing into the room with an open letter in his hand, announced that Squire Hubald, his sire, might be confidently expected at Murdake that very afternoon.

This piece of news effectually dispelled the gay dreams of Sir Clinton and his innamorata. They felt, indeed, as much dismayed at the tidings, as if apparently they had now for the first time in their lives, heard of his existence; whilst the continuation of Master Stephen's "intelligence extraordinary," and his bearing, caused them even yet more discomfort and annoyance.

With considerably more resolution than might have been expected from one of such feeble wit, Master Stephen followed up his information by an attack, in good set terms, upon his mother-in-law and Sir Clinton Murdake.

"Methinks it's just as well my father does come home, Sir," he continued, addressing Sir Clinton, "for sooth to say, strange stories have been told me about you and Mother Dorothea here. Walter Arderne, the falconer, opens his mouth

very wide, Sir Clinton; and Margery, your maid, is not behind hand either, Mistress Doll; and if but the half of what they have told me be truth, the way you have acted towards my father obliges me to say, that you have behaved, Sir Clinton, like a base man. Yes, Sir, I shan't mince the matter with you; you have acted basely, Sir Clinton, in this affair."

"How, Sir?" exclaimed the Knight, starting to his feet; "dare you utter such words to me? Unsay what you have asserted, base yeoman, or I'll fell you to the earth."

Master Stephen, somewhat scared at the fiery glance of the young soldier, unsheathed his rapier, and directing its point at his adversary's breast, retreated hastily towards the door.

Sir Clinton, who was about to rush upon him, and take him by the throat, seemed suddenly to obtain the mastery over his fury. "Fool that I am!" said he, turning away, "I had almost forgotten myself. Begone! Sir," he continued, turning round once more, and addressing the straight-haired youth. "Leave the apartment, and think you have but too

easily escaped, when I excuse from you language that no man on earth has ever dared to utter to me."

"Nay, then, rather begone yourself," returned the youth, who took courage when he found the Knight declined to attack him; "here's a coil, indeed! So I am to be thrust out of my own father's apartments, by one who has abused his hospitality and kindness. I shall not begone, indeed. And I take this opportunity of telling you, too, Mistress Dorothea, that I shall inform my father of your encouraging the addresses of this gentleman! You have been watched, madam, with your gallant, there; and I can bring witnesses of what I say. I defy you both—I do, and will call for assistance from my father's servants if you offer any violence towards me. Here, Walter Arderne, come forth and stand by me; we'll soon see who's to turn out, indeed."

"Now, the foul fiend take thee!" returned the souldier, "for an inordinate fool. Wherefore thus provoke me to inflict chastisement for these insults? Drop the point of your rapier, hound, before I do thee mischief."

In saying this the young cuirassier taking his sheathed rapier in his hand, directed it against the naked point of that of his vapouring adversary. At the first touch of the opposing weapons, the sword of the young squire flew from his grasp as if an engine had hurled it from him, and a smart blow on one side of his cheek laid him sprawling upon the oaken floor.

“Forgive me, Dorothea,” said the Knight, approaching and taking her hand; “this has come upon us somewhat suddenly. I see you are annoyed at my behaviour. I awake, as from some pleasant dreams, to see the horrors I have entailed upon you by my too heedless conduct. You must fly from this roof. Alas, that I should say so, who have so poor a home to offer you. Let us quit Murdake, and when I have placed you in safety, I will return hither to make amends to your injured husband.”

As the young soldier concluded his address, Master Stephen, gathering himself up, with a countenance of some little apprehension, left the apartment; and Dorothea, who, either from her having foreseen that this sort of discovery was likely to be made, or else from the hardi-

ness of disposition which the sequel proved her to possess, had shown a strange degree of apathy during the whole scene. Rising from the seat she had continued to occupy since the commencement of the fracas, and putting her hand upon the young Knight's arm, she thus addressed him :

“ Sir Clinton Murdake, after what has just now occurred, and after all that has passed between us, you ask me to leave this roof with you, and follow your fortunes. It is like yourself, like one of your knightly and noble race, to make the request. I, too, am possessed of generous feeling ; for me you shall never make so great a sacrifice. We have met too late. Heaven only knows how willingly I would have sacrificed fortune, fame, nay, life itself, for your sake. Heaven truly knows, that to be ever near you, I would willingly follow your fortunes, even as a servant in your train ; but it is now, indeed, too late. I leave this roof, but not with you ; only as your wife, Sir Clinton, would I consent to accompany you ; and that is at present impossible.”

“ Say not so, my Dorothea,” returned the cavalier. “ Believe me, dear lady, the bright-

test career would be but valueless unshared by you; and were I now to leave you exposed to the cruel treatment my rash and inconsiderate conduct has entailed upon you, I should carry a very hell within my bosom. Believe me, sweet Dorothea, it would almost kill me to leave you here, after what has even now befallen me."

"Sir Clinton Murdake," returned the infatuated Dorothea, "in me you behold a woman of a disposition you have never yet perhaps had the misfortune to encounter. All the words and arguments I perceive you are about to use, will be vain and useless. I have, indeed, foreseen this matter. Nay, to tell the truth, my own servant hath repentantly confessed to me her treachery after having betrayed me to my husband's son. I have already resolved upon the path I must pursue. Fear you naught for me; all may even yet be well; but you must not now remain at Murdake. Mount your steed, therefore, and transact those matters you were about to engage in relative to the land you own beyond the village of Abbots Wickford; return hither, if you will, in a week from this time. Nay, as you love me, obey my injunctions; bethink you, I have but small

time to prepare myself for the meeting with my husband, and to think in which way I am to reconcile these unhappy matters. Meantime, I will find a messenger to bring aught I have to tell you to the Checquers at Wicksford; and should you think me worth your notice, and ask me to accompany you hereafter, perchance I may take you at your word. Farewell."

It was in vain that the Knight, however astonished at her decision and her request, sought to alter her determination. With the figure and face of a Hebe, she appeared to possess the obstinacy and determination of a demon; and, insisting upon his leaving Murdake instantly, as he valued her peace of mind and her future favour, she refused to hold further parley on the subject, but rushing from the apartment, shut herself up in her own room.

Sir Clinton, who saw a wildness in her eye which looked almost like insanity, and who had never seen a woman so chafed in spirit and so resolute before, thought that the hottest fight in which he had ever been was hardly more fearful than the scrape he had thus got himself involved in, aggravated as it was by

the extraordinary and wilful conduct of his sometime delightful friend Dorothea, which had been so strangely displayed within the last half hour.

CHAPTER VI.

LOVERS' QUARRELS.

Darest thou resolve to kill a friend of mine ?

SHAKSPERE.

SIR CLINTON, after vainly trying to obtain a further interview with the self-willed, wayward, and unhappy Dorothea, who, by her strange conduct, he saw would make matters even worse than they already were, finally resolved to obey her injunctions, and leave Murdake for the time she had specified, waiting during the interval in the neighbourhood. As he, however, distrusted the safety she seemed so assured of, he resolved to present himself again ere long, and render Squire Hubald all the satisfaction he chose to demand for the wrong he had done him, and if necessary to her future happiness, bear off the lovely Dorothea from his cruel grasp. Such was the romantic notion he possessed of honourable conduct, such was the course he considered it was incumbent on him to

take, in order to repair, as far as possible, the injury he had done the husband, and the misery likely to be entailed upon the wife. With this salvo to his conscience, he lingered with no little hardihood during the greater part of the day alone at the Hall, pacing with uneasy steps the apartment ; nor till the setting sun streamed through the ample windows, colouring the oaken floor with a hundred brilliant hues, did he make up his mind to quit the mansion. He, however, resolved to return the next day and remain somewhere in the neighbourhood, for he feared much for the safety of the lady when left to combat the ire of an incensed and coarse-minded husband, with no friendly hand to protect her from his fury, which would inevitably be roused, should Master Stephen keep his promise and divulge their *liaison* to his father.

Donning, then, his plumed hat, and taking his rapier under his arm, he slowly descended the ample staircase and entered the great hall of the building. No servants were in attendance, and the door being open, he paused and looked forth into the noble avenue before him. He was in the house of his ancestors, and gazing upon the domain where so many of his family had lived and flourished in former days ;—those chivalrous and bold an-

cestors, who had helped to conquer England with the Norman invader, fought the holy wars in Palestine, and borne themselves without reproach for so many centuries back. And now was he, the last of his race, almost penniless, without profession or prospects, save his good sword and his right arm, compelled to offer himself like some hireling, for base gold to feed and clothe him. How was he now about to leave the domain of his sires, and how had he visited it! With no sign "save men's opinion and his living blood, to shew the world he was a gentleman," he had wandered from foreign lands and the service of a foreign power, into the neighbourhood where his name alone should have raised him friends amongst the rich and powerful around; had connected himself with the owner of the domain of his sires, and after accomplishing the ruin of his wife, he was about to quit the roof like some caitiff whose deeds had rendered him odious to its inmates. Such were his bitter feelings as he paused and looked out upon the rich foliage of the lovely trees before him, and the mossy carpet of the avenue which darkened their shadows.

"Strange" he exclaimed, as he stopped and

regarded the lovely view in front of the Hall, "this Murdake I have been always taught to believe, has been an unlucky spot to our race. Would to Heaven I had never revisited it! or that I had never met the too lovely being whose destiny is now mixed up with mine own."

A deep sigh caused him to turn his head, and he beheld Dorothea standing within a narrow doorway, which led to a small closet-like apartment, flanking the main entrance of the hall. She looked pale and agitated, but lovely as the Goddess of Spring. Her eyes were bent on the ground when the young soldier caught sight of her, but she quickly raised them, and after giving a hasty glance around, she signed to him to approach. The next moment Sir Clinton was at her side.

"Thank heaven, I once more behold you, Dorothea!" he passionately exclaimed; "you have then at length resolved to quit this roof."

"Hush!" said she, "we are closely observed; grant me a few words in this apartment before you leave. My maid, who knows not of the passage leading from my chamber into this closet, has left me, she considers, in the solitude above. I have much to say, and we must be brief."

She led the way within the closet ; and then opening a door so small as to cause her to stoop low as she entered it, followed by the young cavalier, ascended a flight of stone steps, and gained her own room by an entrance which was concealed behind the stately hangings of the hearse-like bed which filled a recess at one end of the chamber. Time-honoured and faded, but still beautiful, tapestry, hung around the walls of this apartment, where everything was gorgeous, heavy-looking, and massive in the shape of furniture. Huge presses, cumbrous tables, high-backed chairs with richly worked cushions, curious and fantastic mirrors and looking-glasses, were to be seen around. Yet, with all this stateliness and grandeur, the apartment had a gloomy and melancholy look, which was not a little increased by the gigantic cedar trees which grew so close to the windows, as almost to intercept the rays of the setting sun.

"My beautiful, my own Dorothea," cried the Knight, enraptured at again finding himself alone with her, and thus brought where they need fear no interruption to their interview ; "how can I sufficiently thank you for thus blessing me with a meeting ;" and throwing himself at her feet, he seized her hand, and covered it with his kisses.

As Dorothea stood before her lover, listening to his protestations, the tears coursed one another down her cheeks, and fell upon the hand which held her own.

"Sir Clinton Murdake," said she, at length interrupting him; "no more of this, I knew not, till within this hour, how bitter it would be to me for you to depart, perhaps for ever. How I have loved, and how I now adore you, needs not be told. Perchance we have now met for the last time on earth—perchance we may again meet to part no more: whichever fate awaits us, will depend much upon yourself. I am indeed about to put the love you are now so vehemently asserting to the proof. Nay, interrupt me not; we have short time to speak together, none for senseless dalliance. I must be frank with you."

"Sir Clinton Murdake," said she, as the Knight rose to his feet, somewhat impressed by the sternness of manner she had suddenly assumed, "by the hours that we have spent together, by the vows that we have in our overwhelming folly sworn, you know how deeply I at least have loved. Will you now, in my need, aid me to escape the difficulties I have involved myself in, through this too fatal love? Will you, in other words, requite my passion?"

"Will I live, dearest lady?" returned the Knight; "wherefore ask the question? I were unworthy the name I bear did I now desert you. Have I not entreated of you to fly this melancholy and ominous-looking spot with me?"

"I have answered that, Sir Clinton," returned the lady quickly. "I will not do so. In the solitude of this chamber I have considered the best plan for me to pursue. I ask you again, and my future fate depends upon your answer, *"Darest thou resolve to kill a friend of mine?"*

The young soldier, who had been gazing passionately at the beautiful form and lovely face of the Hebe before him, who in her extremity seemed, from the very anxiety depicted in her expressive features, (her rich brown hair hanging dishevelled upon her bosom of snowy whiteness) more lovely than ever, started back at the question, and turned as pallid as herself.

"In heaven's name, what mean you, lady?" he exclaimed; "does my imagination conceive you aright? Would you have me murder the old man, your husband, after having wronged him, and abused the hospitality of his

roof? I trust I have mistaken your meaning."

"You have mistaken, Sir Clinton," returned Dorothea. "I need no champion to interfere between me and him, whom I am fated to call lord and master. There is another being whose death is necessary before my own safety is assured. I saw you cross swords with him this morning, and considered his fate as sealed; but that you played instead of fighting with him, it had been fairly done. You, however, suffered him to escape your awakened wrath. He must be again met, and more surely dealt with."

The young man regarded her fixedly for some minutes before he replied. There was a sternness in his look, that any other less firm than the lady before him would have shrunk from; her eye, however, quailed not; and steadily regarding him, she awaited with marvellous coolness for his reply.

"Lady," said he at length, "I fear we have grievously mistaken each other. The request you have so bluntly made to me, displays an atrocity I could hardly have conceived a woman capable of. Wherefore you should propose to me so miserable a task, as that of depriving of

life that poor and half idiotic driveller the son of your husband, I know not, neither do I know what service my doing such a deed would render you."

"Enough, Sir Clinton," returned Dorothea, "I thought a soldier, and one who had witnessed the scenes I have heard you oftentimes describe, would have thought but little of such matter as the passing his rapier through the body of so insignificant a being as Master Stephen Hubald, more especially, when an insult has been offered to yourself too, and the safety of her you profess to value is at stake. However, thanks to my own wit, I can manage to escape the difficulties with which I am encircled, without your aid."

"Tell me your plans, lady," said the Knight, "that I may aid you by my advice in this matter, since you seem determined to follow your own wayward will."

"Wherefore divulge my plans to one who has refused to act with me in the very first step," returned the wilful woman; "to one who, but that I know his name was never coupled with dishonour, I should say had displayed a want of courage:—yes, to one whom I could call a coward; and wanting in suffi-

cient spirit to encounter a simpleton who is scarcely able to manage his weapon in strife with a cowherd."

"You have so far judged me rightly, lady," returned the Knight, "I am not valorous enough to do battle with such a foe. Demand of me some service that I may perform for you—permit me to remain by your side if you fear aught here; or if you will but listen to my entreaty, fly with me to some distant country, where we may live for each other."

"Both of which plans," said Dorothea, "I have already told you are not to my mind. No, Sir, such arrangement we should repent of, before the seas were well crossed; and yet, as I before said, it may happen that we meet again, if you so wish it; meanwhile, since you will not assist me, it will materially injure both of us should you longer remain at Murdake. Our conference must now end, Sir Clinton, abruptly as it began; follow, that I may guide you out in secrecy." So saying, Dorothea, self-willed and misguided, turning swiftly upon her heel, as though she feared the Knight might make an effort to detain and hold further parley with her, once more vanished through the passage she had entered the room by. Closely followed by Sir Clinton, she descended the

steps and entered the small apartment adjoining the Hall, where, after ascertaining with great caution, that no person was present, she dismissed her lover, with small ceremony and much haste.

CHAPTER VII.

MURDER MOST FOUL.

Approach the chamber, and destroy your sight
With a new Gorgon.

SHAKSPEARE.

SIR Clinton, hastened to the stables in search of his horse, fully resolved to leave a neighbourhood now become singularly disagreeable to him. To his strong love for the mistress of Murdake, had succeeded a feeling amounting to absolute dislike. There appeared to him something singularly unscrupulous in the conscience of Dorothea; and her request so plainly urged upon him to commit the crime of murder, and destroy the poor youth her step-son, argued a depravity he could scarcely reconcile with one so young and beautiful.

In love, and even in friendship, a word or a look will sometimes undo all our feelings of regard, and convert them into indifference and even dislike.

Sir Clinton would have given his ancestral possessions, and the domain he was now hurrying from, had he them in his power to bestow, to the meanest peasant on the estate, provided he could have cleared his conscience and absolved himself from all connexion with the wife of the man who was now in possession of them. There seemed to him something ominous and terrible in the gloomy and half deserted mansion, and which appeared to threaten him personally.

On reaching the stable, he called for his horse, mounted and rode off through the park towards Abbots Wickford.

"I will redeem my pledge," he said aloud, as he drew bridle, when outside the park palings, and in the deep and sandy road leading to the village. "Yes, I will keep watch over this extraordinary compound of beauty, simplicity, wilfulness, and, I begin to fear, wickedness. If I am to do her service, it must be by intruding myself into her husband's house like a common robber, since she has thus dismissed me from her presence.

"I will return here and lie perdue, so as to be near in case of necessity. She seems to have some strange plan of operations to pursue, which will, perchance, place her in considerable trouble. Yes, I will return here this night, and watch over the safety of this wilful woman; she forgets that I am possessed of the key to the small postern, which admits to her chamber from the plesaunce."

The young soldier now once more turned his horse's head from the woods of Murdake, and striking him with his armed heel, soon gained the village of Wickford. Alighting in the yard of the Checquers, he threw the reins to the ostler, and entered the inn.

Mine host, rejoiced to have a customer of such quality, hastened from his easy chair in the bar, to bid him welcome.

"Fore me, but your honour is right welcome to the Checquers," he commenced;—for he was a right portly and merry conceited host, and fit company for an emperor as well as cobbler, when exercising his vocation in his little inn. "Ecod, but it's a raw evening, Sir traveller," he continued. "Here Marian, lass, bestir thyself, and light up a good fire in the sanded parlour—you'll find we can make

your honour comfortable at the Checquers, I promise you that. Right sorry am I that we had not intelligence of your Lordship's travelling this road, that I might have made preparation of our best apartment, instead of your Grace being compelled to remain thus long in the common room of the house. Perhaps your worship will honour my poor bar, by stepping into it whilst we get the parlour fire alight."

"There's no need of it," returned the cavalier, who had thrown himself upon the oaken settle beside the fire which blazed upon the hearth; "make no preparation for me, good Sir, but fill me a cup of your best canary, and order me something by way of supper, as soon as it can be prepared. I prefer the cheerful blaze of these logs, and the company of these good folks here, to the chill and solitude of your state apartment. Let your ostler take good care of my palfrey, and summon me when he's ready for his feed. I always see the oats transferred from the manger to my steed's mouth myself, mine host! it's a practice I've learnt in the wars, where a man's beast is sometimes his truest friend. I shall take the road again, too, ere nightfall, and perchance

return hither when the business I have in hand is transacted. Meanwhile, there's a broad piece in hand the whilst to cover the present expences of my entertainment."

"Your Lordship shall be obeyed," said the landlord, eyeing the piece of gold and the stranger alternately. "There's some mystery here, I suspect," he continued, as he moved away to give the necessary orders. "I wonder who the foul fiend this can be; I must go look at the steed he seems so chary of. He looks a nobleman; he's dressed like a soldier from the German wars; I wonder whether any body ever noticed him in these parts before. There's a something on his mind I guess, too," he continued, as he gained his bar, and peeped at the Knight from behind the little red blind of its window; "see how he shifts his position, Marian lass, and keeps beating the devil's tattoo with his ponderous spur upon the hearth. I fear me this restlessness of body betokens a restlessness of mind, Sir cavalier. Marian, that hero is either going to fight a duel to-morrow morning, or he has done a murder this very afternoon; we shall have news, girl, of this gallant ere long, sure as my name's Archibald Civilbonnet."

"What nonsense, uncle," said the maid of the inn, regarding the stranger with an approving glance, as she busied herself in placing the wine upon her best waiter; "look at that gentleman's face, and then ask yourself if he could do a deed of ill omen; why he's the handsomest and most noble-looking cavalier that ever darkened your door-way. He's a duke, I dare take my oath on't. He's either a duke, or a prince in disguise, depend upon it, uncle."

"Egad, you may be right, lass," returned the host; "he's likely to be a gentleman, he's so easy to please. Mayhap he's a parliament member; but no, they're but a low race now-a-days. Yes, lass, he's doubtless some great person returned from abroad, now we are a trifle more quiet, to look after his own. See, there he is up again, and striding about the room like a restless spirit. Ecod, if he is going to fight a duel, I shouldn't like to encounter him, duke or d—l. I'll wager, from his very gait, that he can keep time, distance, and proportion."

Sir Clinton, after partaking of the refreshment offered, and attending to the feeding and grooming of his steed, quaffed a cup of kindness with the loquacious landlord; and finding his mind but ill at ease, after the events of the

morning, resolved to leave the comfortable hostel somewhat earlier than he had before intended. The room was now beginning to be filled with some of the choice spirits of the village, from whose conversation he learned that Squire Hubald had just passed through the street on his road to the Hall. He therefore called to the host, and avowed his determination to depart.

"I have altered my mind, landlord," he said, "and shall ride forward something sooner this evening. My horse is fresh, and I have business in these parts which will not permit of any loitering on the road."

"Perhaps your Grace—I beg pardon, but I forget what name your Lordship called yourself by," said the host; "perhaps your Grace may honour the Checquers by returning to-night after you have settled the affairs you allude to."

"Perhaps so," returned the cavalier, "though I rather think not, as I have that upon my hands which will make me a borrower of several hours of the night."

"Your worship shall be welcome, come when you may," said the host. "John ostler shall sit up for you, though I rather advise you to

take your ease here in my house than ride forth on this raw and comfortless evening, more especially as I cannot vouch for the safety of our roads hereabout after dark. There are ugly customers not unfrequently 'twixt this and Hill Moreton. I think your honour said you intended taking the Stratford road. The ways, too, are somewhat foul for your steed."

"We shall do vastly well," returned the cavalier, throwing his cloak over his shoulders, and smiling at the landlord's attempts to discover something of his name and business in the county, "we shall do vastly well, I dare say. Hard knocks and foul ways, and even the green turf for a night's lodging, are not altogether such novelties to either myself or my charger, good host, that they should hinder matters of business. They whose necessities drive them to the alternative of stopping one whose trade is war, upon the highway, will find but small encouragement in the exploit, you may take my word on't."

So saying, the Knight, taking a courteous leave of him of the Checquers, mounted his gallant-looking steed, and proceeded slowly through the street of the little village, as if intending to make for the town of Stratford-upon-Avon. When, however, he had

cleared the outskirts, he turned his face once again towards Murdake Hall, and proceeded by a circuitous and somewhat intricate way along a dark and overshadowed lane.

It was an unfrequented road, which Dorothea, in one of their hawking expeditions, had led him home by, difficult rather of access even in broad daylight; but, now that the shades of evening had enveloped the surrounding scene, it required all his ingenuity to make his way along its shadowy windings, without involving himself in the thick woods which grew on either hand. However, as he knew it brought him out close upon the paling of the park, and within a mile of Murdake Hall, he persevered; and after having more than once been obliged to dismount and retrace his steps, in order to gain the track, he at length found himself in the vicinity he sought. Tying his horse to a tree in the lane, he leaped the paling and made his way to the Hall.

Having nearly reached the garden wall, in rear of the building, he kept cautiously beneath the shadow of the enormous oaks, which just here threw their broad arms over the green sward beneath his feet, so thickly as to render their vicinity dark as night.

The moon shone out brightly as he paused before the small door which admitted into the gardens.

One of those old and massive walls, of which we now occasionally see the remains running round the ample pleasure grounds of some of the moss-clad and ivy-crested, mansions of bygone times, stood before him. The fruit-tree tops, silvered by the moon, encroached in rich profusion here and there, and seemed struggling to reach over into the park where he stood.

After a few minutes' hesitation, he stepped forth from beneath the shade ; and gaining the little postern door in the old wall, tried to open it ; as he expected, it was locked. Scarcely had he relinquished the iron handle which lifted the latch, and made up his mind to scale the wall, when he heard footsteps on the other side, and a key applied to the lock. Drawing himself close under the shade of the old wall, he stood fast, and the next moment the door was cautiously opened, and two persons came forth in the clear moonlight, not half a dozen paces from where he had placed himself. What was his surprise to behold in one of them the mistress of the Hall, and in the person of the other the falconer, Walter Arderne.

They appeared deeply interested in discussing some matter of import, and it seemed to Sir Clinton that the lady was urging the falconer to some act he had small desire to engage in. Sir Clinton was surprised, and somewhat annoyed at what he saw; too far from them to play the part of eaves-dropper, which he would have scorned, he yet resolved to remain stationary for a few moments, and observe their movements ere he stepped from his concealment. "Was it possible," thought he, "that he had shared in the affections of the lady with her own servant?" He determined to remain till they separated, and then to address himself to Dorothea and seek an explanation. They, however, parted at the garden-door, and the falconer having closed and locked it, remained in deep consideration for some minutes after he had done so, whilst the lady was heard swiftly retracing her steps on the other side towards the building.

After awhile the falconer seemed to have come to some sort of settlement with his troubled ideas, and moved slowly along the garden wall. He passed so near to Sir Clinton, that he almost touched him; but his eyes were rivetted upon the earth at his feet, and he saw him not. Once or twice he stopped, and ap-

peared half inclined to return, and then quickening his pace, he was soon out of sight.

Sir Clinton had, meanwhile, almost determined to abandon his intention of spending some part of the night in the gardens of the Hall, in order to watch over the safety of one who he now had reason to believe was thoroughly depraved. But feeling still that he was bound to endeavour to succour her, should she require his aid, he mounted the wall by the small doorway, and leaping down on the other side, made his way along a dark walk leading to an arbour not many yards distant from the postern door which admitted by the private staircase into Dorothea's chamber.

From this spot he could observe the window of her room, and in case of violence being offered her he conceived he must necessarily hear any outcry: in such a case he could immediately admit himself by the key in his possession and make to her assistance.

Despite the heavy fall of dew, he threw himself upon the mossy flooring of the arbour, and drawing his riding cloak closely around him, prepared to keep watch and ward beneath the chamber of her he had so lately regarded with feelings of admiration and devoted love, till the dawn should dismiss him from the duty he

thought himself, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, bound to perform.

As the cavalier reclined upon the bench within the arbour, his thoughts reverted to the first time of his meeting with the mistress of the Hall, whose disposition and conduct had, within the last few hours of their intimacy, so fearfully developed her unscrupulous character. He began to marvel within himself at the infatuation which had seized upon him; a hundred little events during their intimacy now presented themselves to his remembrance, which clearly shewed him to be the dupe of her artful conduct, and he soon began to regard himself as the seduced instead of the seducer.

Becoming more and more imbued with these altered feelings, he now blamed himself for assuming a sort of guardianship of the young beauty; and yet his romantic and chivalrous feeling of honour would not allow of his leaving Dorothea to bear the whole brunt of the *éclaircissement* he feared was about to take place, whilst he himself, in a manner, had fled. His position was ridiculous, and exceedingly strange; but nevertheless he felt that it was the only one he could, under present circumstances, occupy. In such thoughts and reminiscences he passed his time whilst the

iron tongue of the clock of the old Hall twice struck the hour of the night, without any thing occurring to disturb the tenor of his meditations.

The mansion wrapped in gloomy grandeur, changed its aspect ever and anon as the clouds rolled beneath the moon. At times it appeared grey and spectral-looking, with its Gothic casements glittering and sparkling, as though a shower of stars were reflected in their diamond panes ; and then, again, it darkened down into an ominous-looking and heavily built bastile, reared from the firmest earth, with no ray of light to enliven its sombre and frowning walls.

Hitherto he had observed no sound or sign to give token of the mansion being even inhabited ; but as the clock once more, with lazy chime, struck the time of the night, and proclaimed the eleventh hour, he observed a light in Dorothea's chamber. After awhile several more of the windows in the upper part of the building were illumined by passing gleams of light, as though the inhabitants were retiring to rest, and then the mansion and all around it once more lay in gloom and tranquillity. The moon now withdrew her light, and the heavy clouds gathering over the Hall,

the rain began to patter on the trees as the Knight lay and watched its shadowy walls.

He began to congratulate himself with the thought that all his fears regarding the threatened quarrel and Master Stephen's anger had taken a favourable turn, and made up his mind to leave the vicinity of the building. He had even reached the little postern gate in the wall of the garden, when suddenly the mastiff, chained in the court-yard, uttered a melancholy and long drawn howl. He paused at the sound, and turned again towards the mansion.

The baying of a dog in the silence of the night is never a pleasing sound to listen to. The trees in this part of the garden sighed in the night wind, and uttered a sort of dreary whisper. Suddenly the Knight thought he saw a twinkling light through their foliage in the direction of Dorothea's window. Again the dog uttered a long drawn and melancholy whine. The sound struck upon the soldier's heart: it had an ominous and fearful note. He quitted the door, and pacing along the mossy path of the dark walk, once more felt his way towards the mansion.

His eyes had not deceived him: there was a light, and evidently some stir in Dorothea's chamber. Suddenly he was aware of a bust-

ling noise within the room, as of persons struggling. He grasped the key of the small door, and unsheathing his rapier, made towards it, and was about to apply it to the lock, and introduce himself into the passage. Still as he heard neither shriek nor outcry, he paused. The hound again uttered a dismal and deep mouthed bay, and at the same moment he thought he distinguished the voice of old Hubald, calling for assistance as if unwell.

"Help, Doll! help!" he heard, and then all remained silent as the grave.

The Knight was fairly posed; he stood before the door about to apply the key he held in his hand, but the present sounds within the mansion seemed no warrant for the intrusion. A strange feeling of dread crept over him. He felt a nervous horror of the place he was in which he could not account for. On the stricken field, when on picquet, he had stood alone in the dead of night, beside the ghastly bodies of the slain, he had never felt so unmanned as in this garden. The night wind sighed around the old building, and the owl whooped from the woods in the park. He was conscious of one of those strange feelings creeping over him which sometimes occur in the gloom of a lonely and melancholy neighbour-

hood—a feeling of utter loneliness, and yet a presentiment of some person hovering in his vicinity. Sir Clinton was brave as steel; but still he felt at this moment a sort of horror which quite unnerved him. He glanced fearfully around, and found that he was not the only occupant of the garden. A shadowy figure advanced from the further end of the building towards the spot where he stood. It seemed so occupied in reconnoitering the grounds in the immediate vicinity of the house, every now and then stopping and listening, that as Sir Clinton was situate close within the shadow of the mansion, he was not perceived until it had approached within a few paces. Surprise at this sudden rencontre seemed to deprive the person of all reflection and presence of mind; he recoiled for an instant, and the knight advancing to accost him, the figure drew his sword, and violently assailed him. Sir Clinton although on his guard was well nigh wounded by the suddenness of the assault. He drew back, however, and avoided the deadly thrust aimed at his bosom, and his own rapier was in an instant before him. His antagonist was but an infant in opposition, he seemed half paralyzed with alarm, and struck wildly and at random. Sir Clinton keeping

away from his weapon, and parrying his blows as well as he could in the uncertain light, received a wound in the sword-arm as he, at length, closed upon and struck his opponent to the earth. Suddenly a piercing scream was heard within the building, another and another succeeded. The knight, who had wrenched the weapon from the grasp of his unknown antagonist, was struck with the sound, for he thought he distinguished the voice of Dorothea. Again the shrieks were repeated. He turned towards the sound, and his prostrate foe arose, and flying swiftly through the gardens, escaped. The Knight making for the postern door, threw it open, and hastily ascended the steps towards Dorothea's chamber. Shriek upon shriek rung out as he gained the sliding panel, and hastily withdrawing it, introduced himself into her apartment.

The sight which he beheld there, and the reception he met with, sufficiently surprized him. In the centre of the apartment stood Dorothea in her night-dress, and upon the bed lay the corpse of the old man her husband. She ceased her outcries as he appeared, and stood for the moment like himself transfixed with surprize.

"What devil," she at length said hastily addressing him, "what devil prompted you hither, Sir Clinton Murdake?"

"I came to succour thee, lady," he answered. "What accident has happened here? Your husband is dead!"

"No matter, Sir," returned Dorothea angrily, "begone, on your life. You have nearly ruined all by this intrusion. Fool, that you are, what cursed stupidity could prompt you hither? Quick, for heaven's sake, begone; I hear foot-steps in the corridor."

"Dorothea," said the Knight, "I begin to understand you now. A horrible suspicion flashes across me. You have murdered this poor wretch your husband."

"'Tis false, meddling fool!" cried the lady, seizing the Knight by the arm, and endeavouring forcibly to eject him from the chamber.

Sir Clinton, however, stood firm, and regarded her for a moment with a searching look. Dorothea quailed beneath his glance, and staggering back a few paces, sank into a chair beside her dressing-table, and, burying her face in her hands, burst into tears:

Stepping to the table beside which she sat,

Sir Clinton took the lamp in his hand, and approaching the bed, stooped and gazed upon the face of the corpse.

Although the bed-clothes had been apparently hastily smoothed over, and all outward and visible signs of violence removed, and although no crimson tide flowed over and sullied the whiteness of the sheets, the Knight thought he there beheld enough to confirm his suspicion that the old man had met with foul play.

His face was black, and full of blood ;
His eye-balls further out than when he lived,
Staring full ghastly, like a strangled man :
His hair uprear'd, his nostrils stretch'd with struggling,
His hand abroad display'd, as one that grasp'd
And tugged for life, and was by strength subdued.

The Knight looked long and fixedly at the dreadful object before him, and then turning from its contemplation, he once more addressed himself to the still weeping Dorothea.

"Lady," said he, "whatever success you may have with others, you cannot deceive me in this business. Accursed was the hour in which I first beheld your face ; peace of mind is gone from me for ever. Nay, I feel as though I had been your accomplice in this most wicked deed. Farewell, Dorothea, I obey

your injunctions, and leave you to the accomplishment of the drama you have begun the performance of. You are safe from me, whatever happens; but from this hour you will never again behold me."

Before he had ceased speaking, Dorothea had fainted, and fallen heavily upon the floor. He heeded her not, but swiftly withdrew from the apartment, and closed the secret entrance just as the inmates of the Hall, who had been for some time clamouring for admittance, succeeded in forcing open the chamber door.

CHAPTER VIII.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

Master Fang, have you entered the action ?

It is entered.

Where is your yeoman ?—Is he a lusty yeoman ?
Will he stand to't ?

It may chance cost some of us our lives, for he
will stab.

SHAKSPERE.

ABOUT half a mile from the little town of Hill Moreton, upon the banks of a rivulet which here fell into the Avon, stood in former days a small water mill, which, together with some hundred acres of land, was the sole remaining property of the last of the Murdakes.

This little portion of land was named, in conformity with its extent, the Hundred Acres. Sir Clinton had already sold three parts of the estate, to furnish himself forth at various times during his foreign service ; and the business which had led him to this part of the country, now that his occupation was gone in the land of pike and caliver, was to dispose of those

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few acres which remained to him, and the old mill which stood upon them.

The shattered ruin of what had once been a monastery, stood at a short distance. This structure had subsequently been converted, on the suppression of those establishments, into a sort of dwelling house, by the before-mentioned ancestor of the present Sir Clinton, who had in Harry the Eighth's reign, built Murdake Hall; and after impoverishing his estate at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, had retired thither, to repent of his folly.

It was early on the morning after the transactions we have narrated occurred at Murdake Hall, that a single horseman rode slowly up to the mill-house of Hill Moreton and inquired for Master Michael Windblow, the miller.

"Margaret, bring glasses, lass, and let us have the canary and sack bottles. Shew that gentleman in here, directly, and send Diccon out to take his horse," cried the hospitable old miller. Good Master Windblow had been for full thirty years crippled in his lower limbs, and confined to the parlour of his mill, where he amused himself in exercising his hospitality, and drinking with every passenger he could inveigle into his presence.

"I'm happy to see you, Sir," he began, as soon as the horseman was ushered into his snug little room. "An early stirrer, Sir. I'm

glad to see you young men can rise betimes, as I do myself. Fill my glass, Margaret," he continued, turning to the smart and exceedingly pretty girl who had answered to his hasty summons, on seeing the stranger ride up to the house. "Fill my glass, Margaret, ye slut, and hand the gentleman the bottle. Your health, Sir! I'm heartily glad to see you in my poor dwelling, be your business what it may; gentle or simple, all's welcome to old Windblow. I've been full thirty years, Sir, confined to this room, Sir, sore afflicted with a complaint in my spine. Yes, Sir, I've watched the shadows on field and furrow from that window, every day, these two and thirty years, and never stirred from this room; but I'm content and happy so, every thing thrives with me, and I bless God for all I possess, thanking him for his good gifts, and making no words of my ailments. Margaret, ye jade, tell Diccon to put that horse into the stable, he'll break away from him else. Let him feed him and rub him down, and then do you bring in breakfast immediately. A good lass, Sir, and well given. The fairest flower in my garden, and takes as much care of me, poor helpless devil that I am, as if I were a sucking infant."

"I am glad to make your acquaintance,

Master Windblow," said the stranger, as soon as he could get a word in edgeways; "though you have been known to me by name and reputation for years. I am glad to make your acquaintance, and to see you are the same kind hospitable man I have heard my father often speak of."

"Ah! ah!" returned the round-faced miller, "no doubt, no doubt, every body in the county knows me; that is, except the quality, for I don't keep company with folks above my station. Still, every man as owns a horse to ride on in Warwickshire has visited old bed-ridden Windblow. Where did you say you had heard me talked of?"

"Your name," said the stranger, "has been known to me further a-field than Warwickshire, Master Windblow. I have heard of you, and even from you, in other lands afar; I have seen your hand-writing, Master Windblow, in the Netherlands, in France, and in Spain."

"Ah, indeed!" said the miller, "say you so? I hardly thought my fame had reached so far. But stay, let me see. You're accoutred something like a warrior, surely you must have brought me some token from my beloved old master's son? You, perhaps, can give me tidings of Sir Clinton Murdake; who, sorry am I to say so, is engaged in the troublous wars of

the Low Countries. If so, speak, good Sir ! for I long to hear news of the last of the Murdakes, through whose family I owe all my success on earth."

The stranger rose from his seat, and looked forth from the lattice upon the lovely scene before him; after a while he turned, and seizing the old miller's hand, wrung it heartily.

"Thou good old servant," he said, with a voice husky from emotion, "you see before you the son of your old friend, for I will not call him master, and who, in person, has come to give you thanks for the kindnesses you have so often afforded him in his hour of need. Yes, Master Windblow, to you I have no scruple in owning, that but for the timely assistance you have more than once given me when in difficulties, I had, perchance, died in a foreign land. Your kindness enabled me to gain the notice and friendship of a crowned king, and such an one as I fear the world will not soon look upon the like of again. He died," continued the cavalier, mournfully, "and would to heaven, since it was to be so, that I had perished with him. Had he lived, Master Windblow, perchance I had once more restored the fortunes of our house; but with his fall, for the present, have my own fortunes again

become overcast. Yet, still I am not altogether without the means of repaying my various obligations to you, and I am come here for the purpose of discharging my debt, and transacting other business appertaining."

"The foul fiend take such debts!" cried the overjoyed miller. "Out upon your debts to me: do I not owe all I have to thee and thine? Have I not prospered from a stipendiary to become the master of lands and beeves, men-servants and maid-servants, horses and carts? Tush, man, never tell me, I hold all in trust for thee since thy father's death; and I give it thee out and out. Here, Margaret, ye jade, attend here; more eggs, more bread, more capons, more bacon, more ale, more sack, and more every thing. God! that I should say so, but I have lived long enough since I have seen this day, and care not how soon these useless old feet are carried out foremost, and laid in Hill Moreton church-yard. Yer health, Sir Clinton; well do I remember the day your father left the old house yonder for foreign parts, and in the service of a foreign power. You were a crack not thus high, and I begged hard that he would leave you to my care."

The old miller was well nigh beside himself with joy at the unexpected appearance of his

young landlord; and the twain, seated before a substantial repast by way of breakfast, such as a Warwickshire yeoman would bestow upon his best friend in the good old days, eat, drank, and chatted for two mortal hours by Hill Moreton clock. While thus occupied, there arrived an accession to their party in the shape of some half a dozen gentlemen in leathern doublets and steel caps, and who, armed to the teeth, drew up their horses before the miller's door, and proceeded to make themselves rather more free than welcome.

"Come in here! come in!" shouted the miller, as the leader of the party was apparently giving some directions to his men. "Come in here. What are ye jawing about, out there? Come in, I say, there's no secrets in this house. Ah! ah! Master Gripewell, is it you out and about this morning?" he continued, as a burly, strong-built, square-shouldered man, with a forbidding countenance, and a face covered with hair like a coppice of brushwood, entered the room. "Whose hen-roost has suffered now, eh? Come, drink, man, drink; baptize your beard after your ride, and invite those gentlemen in here to take a cup with you."

"Thanks, Michael, thanks," returned the other, "I'll taste your wine myself; but we've no time to stop with you this morning, we're on the track of a gallant who has committed a dark deed last night, and which, doubtless, you have heard of. Young Master Stephen Hubald has been foully and cruelly murdered last night, and there's terrible work up at the Hall. Old Hugh Hubald is also dead, and his young wife, Mistress Dorothea, in strange distress, and hardly expected to live through the day. 'Tis a mysterious piece of work, and we are in full chase of the murderer, who I suspect has taken the Stratford road."

"How, Sir," said the cavalier, in considerable surprise, "did you say young Master Stephen Hubald was last night slain?"

"Ay, did I," returned Gripewell, who was the head constable of Wickford, "he was shot like a fat buck, Sir, with a cross-bow bolt through his brain, at the end of the avenue, and found last night by the messenger who was dispatched for a leech, as soon as the Lady Dorothea discovered her husband either dead or in a fit. Master Windblow," continued the thief-taker, after setting down his glass, and looking hard at the astonished cavalier, "perhaps

my comrades might like to take a glass this morning; with your good leave, I'll e'en ask 'em in"

The constable left the room for a few minutes, and returning with his comrades, immediately drew a pistol from his belt, and presenting it at the head of the Knight, desired his men to secure him, dead or alive.

"Sir Clinton Murdake," he said, "I arrest you in the Lord Protector's name, for the murder of Stephen Hubald; seize him, men, and hold him fast."

The Knight struck the pistol from the hand of the constable in an instant, and starting to his feet, half drew his rapier from the sheath, but was in the next moment borne to the ground by the five men who sprung upon him from behind, and by main strength and weight, overwhelmed him, overturning old Windblow in the eagerness with which they all sprung upon his shoulders. The young Knight, however, was not a man to be taken easily; he arose from the press again like some tiger at bay, and almost fought himself clear of the whole crew; whilst the effect this sudden onslaught had upon the Miller of Hill Moreton was somewhat surprising, since it wrought a miracle upon his crippled limbs.

As he was overturned in the attack, he had seized a crutch by his side, and nearly fractured the skull of one of the assailing party ; then gathering himself up from where he had been hurled to, he stood, to his own astonishment, whole and sound. He waited not to consider or comment upon the cure which surprise and alarm had occasioned, but struck manfully in, to the assistance of the Knight, who, in the next minute, stood with his rapier in his hand, and freed from his assailants.

"How, now, ye rude unmannered hounds," cried the Knight, as he stood with his back to the wall, whilst his opponents, who had felt his strength and prowess, hesitated for the moment to oppose his rapier's point: "how, now; what sort of beastly attack do you call this; and how dare you, sirrah, accuse me of murdering the youth you have named."

"Ah," said the miller, adopting Sir Clinton's tone of defiance, "how dare you come into my parlour, and assault me and my guest in that fashion, ye ill-favoured set of blood-hounds? Ecod, but I see Margaret's shrieks have brought my men across the meadow, and may I be hanged but I'll have the whole filthy lot of ye flung into my mill dam."

"I must execute my warrant," exclaimed

the constable, "and will do so, spite of all you can do, Master Windblow, or your men either. I am directed to arrest Sir Clinton Murdake for the murder of young Stephen Hubald. By the description given me, I suspect this to be the man: are you not, Sir, the person I have named?"

"I am Sir Clinton Murdake," returned the cavalier; "who accuses me of so foul a deed?"

"The head falconer of the Hall, Walter Arderne, whom you also wounded last night, in the gardens of Murdake: there's my warrant for what I do, and I demand you to yield to me, in the Protector's name, ere more mischief ensue."

"Master Windblow," said the cavalier, turning to the miller, "there is some mistake here; 'tis fit I oppose not this man's warrant. I know not which to be most surprised at, the strangeness of the accusation, or the seeming miracle that has been wrought upon your limbs. I yield myself as your prisoner," continued the cavalier, "and desire to be instantly conveyed before the nearest magistrate, that I may be able to clear myself, and explain away this mistake."

When the Knight was accordingly conveyed by his captors before the magistrate of Hill

Moreton, he found it not quite so easy a matter to clear himself of the charge against him, as he had imagined.

The person before whom he was taken, was one of the sour faction who at that time had the upper hand in England. He was a Puritan ; and the very look of our cavalier, his gallant bearing, his noble countenance and his military air, like Orlando's virtues, " served him but as enemies ;" and in this worthy's eye, " envenomed him that bore them." He was, accordingly, in the first place, found guilty of being a gentleman, and condemned, almost ere the accusation was heard against him.

" Let him be strongly guarded, constable," said the magistrate, as soon as he had heard the accusation against him ; " take him below. I'll hear no explanation, Sir," he continued, as the knight endeavoured to make himself heard. " Gather the evidence you have together, constable, and let them attend forthwith ; we shall doubtless find more in this than you imagine. These Murdakes have ever been a restless and bloody race, using the carnal weapon upon light grounds ; and thrusting themselves into every man's quarrel from the conquest of this troubled land, up to the present hour. Take away that prating com-

panion also, who has so strangely found his legs in this business; I'll teach him better manners ere I have done with him, than to oppose the execution of a warrant."

"I would your honour did but hear reason, and let this gentleman speak," said the miller; "it might, perchance, save you trouble hereafter."

"I will hear him, in good time, Sir," said the stern official, "and you too, to your cost. Take them away, Gripewell, and mind, I look to you for their safe custody."

The cavalier, who had not deigned to speak, after having been abruptly silenced on his first attempt at explanation, cast a withering look of scorn upon the man in office; then turning round, accompanied his captors from apartment.

When Sir Clinton was again brought up from the apartment in Mr. Ilwill's house, where he had been conveyed along with his companion the miller, the circumstantial evidence against him was so strong, that it seemed likely to go hard with him, and even Master Windblow was confounded. The falconer of Murdake Hall stoutly swore that he had been attacked by him in the vicinity of that building, but a short time before the body of

young Hubald was discovered. He had been assailed, to his astonishment, by the Knight in the pleasure-garden, whilst making his customary rounds, ere retiring to the lodge for the night ; nay, he was pretty sure, he said, that the Knight had the mark of his weapon upon his person, as he had wounded him in self-defence, and put him to flight. This, on examination, proved to be the case, Sir Clinton having evidently received a slight and recent wound in the fleshy part of his right arm, just above the elbow-joint. The falconer further deposed to Sir Clinton having sought to fasten a quarrel upon young Master Stephen on that very morning, and even to his having struck him down, though he protested he knew nothing whatever about the origin of the dispute. Whilst the landlord of the Checquers filled up the measure of the evidence against him, by deposing to Sir Clinton's appearance at his inn on the evening referred to ; the strangeness of his demeanour whilst there ; his own sagacity and prophetic warning to his barmaid, that if the stranger had not already committed, he was about to commit some awful crime ; and even the confession of the Knight himself, that he had work upon his hands which would employ him

during the hours of the night. The landlord further stated that Sir Clinton had slunk away some minutes before young Master Stephen had visited the Checquers on that evening, as if to avoid being seen by him: that Master Stephen had come to the inn later than usual, from the circumstance of his having ridden part of the way home with his father; and that whilst sitting with him in his bar, and discussing the merits of a flask of Muscadine, the young man had hinted at some grievance against a gentleman then staying at the Hall, which he was to disclose to his father on the following morning. Moreover, the landlord affirmed he was able to produce a youth of the village who, in passing along the Rugby road, had seen Sir Clinton's horse tied to a tree in the lane which led towards Wickford, and which he knew from the furniture and caparisons to belong to that gentleman.

Sir Clinton himself refused to account for his employment, or where he had spent his time on the night in question, lest he should implicate the Lady Dorothea. Grievously as he suspected her of having been the originator of both these murders, (one of which was

publicly suspected) he considered himself bound in honour not to compromise the wretched woman, even to the sullyng her fair fame, by attempting his own vindication, in explaining his reasons for being in the vicinity of the Hall when this unhappy deed had been perpetrated. As he considered himself in some sort the cause of the lady's unscrupulous conduct, he would have consented to have been torn to pieces by wild horses, ere he uttered a sentence that might endanger her safety.

Accordingly, he resolved not, in that presence, to give any explanation of his actions, after seeing the turn the affairs had taken; contenting himself with denying the crime imputed to him, and giving the lie to the falconer's charge against him. With regard to the assault committed by him on young Master Stephen Hubald, the morning of his murder, he affirmed that the youth had brought a slight chastisement upon himself, through his having used opprobrious epithets towards him, and even drawn his rapier whilst under his own father's roof. The examination ended, the young Knight quickly found himself committed to Warwick jail for the murder of Stephen Hubald of Murdake Hall, and

Master Windblow, the miller, for his share in the morning's diversion, had his newly recovered legs clapt into the stocks of Hill Moreton.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HOSTEL.

In winter's tedious nights sit by the fire
With good old folks, and let them tell thee tales.

SHAKSPERE.

It was about three weeks after the transactions we have narrated had taken place, that some six or seven persons were collected together in the common apartment or kitchen of the little inn at Abbots Wickford; three of them were guests, the others were mine host, his niece, and his ostler or man of all-work. A greasy-looking Joan, the drudge of the inn sprawling on all-fours, and up to her elbows in sand, keeled the pot in a sort of scullery adjacent to the apartment.

This kitchen, or common room of the hostel,

for it was the apartment into which all the guests usually chose to congregate and discuss the news of the shire, was a perfect picture of the rural comfort of those days, and might have formed a study for an artist's eye.

There was the wide old chimney, the blazing logs upon the hearth, the rafters and beams black with soot, and venerable with age, over head; the fitch hanging like unscored armour on the wall; and the hams and tongues pendant from the roof. Whilst the shining pots and kettles reflected back the ruddy flame; and all the implements of the culinary art, necessary to a house of entertainment arranged and ready for use on the morrow, were pendant and glittering, each on its proper peg or nail around. In fact, it was a picture of a well kept kitchen, of a properly regulated hostel in Old England some two centuries ago.

The comfortable scene within doors was rendered yet more grateful to the present inmates of the inn from the roughness and violence of the weather without. It was the very witching hour of night. The rain beat against the casement, the deep-mouthed thunder crashed over head, and the fitful lightning ever and anon paled the flame upon the hearth.

The conversation of the party assembled, as is almost invariably the case under similar circumstances partook of the terrible; like the howling of the storm, it was black, ominous, and fearful. As it in some measure advances the progress of our tale, we will give it as it took place.

Mine host himself, ever a jovial and jolly companion, and whose laughter was ready chorus to the mirth of his guests, was on this night in some sort oppressed with the melancholy of the party, and more grave in converse than was his wont.

“’Fore gad, but this is poor weather for us, my masters,” he observed. “If this is to last much longer, we shall have a famine in the land. What with civil wars one while, and uncivil weather another, the country’s in a hopeful condition. My fields are clean drowned, and have been so any time these six weeks past. My sheep are murrained; my pigs are measled; my cattle distempered, and the highways and byeways are alike undistinguishable: nay, I hav’nt had a guest since the sessions last Tuesday at Warwick, to darken my doors, except yourselves; and no great wonder either, with the waters out all over the country like this. Every river

in the shire I think has overflown, and I am rheumatized from crown to toe."

"You were at the sessions, I think," inquired one of his guests.

"Aye was he," returned another, "he was a witness there, and obliged to attend."

"And how went matters?" said the speaker, who was a Coventry man; "we heard Sir Clinton Murdake was condemned, and will hang on Wednesday next."

"I would I had been elsewhere," said the host, "for I begin not to like the part I have had in that business. Fool that I was, what had I to do, thrusting my say into the affair in such a mortal hurry. It's a mysterious business from beginning to end, Master Orton. As to whether or not Sir Clinton Murdake will be hanged, I can't say, as the affair is to be settled by trial of battle."

"Trouble not your head about that, landlord," said the stranger who had first spoken, and who was a discarded serving-man from Murdake Hall, "that spark is as sure of dancing upon nothing on Wednesday next, as you are of swallowing that cup of sugared sack. It was a foul murder, and hath been clearly proved upon him. I see no good there was in allowing

him so much grace, although his execution is, in consequence, delayed but a brief space."

"I can't observe," returned mine host, "how that may turn out: I never saw a guilty man look as yon gentleman bore him in court; I should'nt like to be Walter Arderne's champion, in the matter, guilty or innocent."

"Walter Arderne needs none of your assistance, whether you would or not. He's the strongest fellow in these parts, besides being the most skilful wrestler, the best swordsman, and the most dangerous hand at quarter-staff in all Warwickshire. I saw him fight long George Elliot, the North-country champion, on Kenilworth Green. Lord help us! Elliot was a giant to look on, but Walter Arderne beat him to a mummy, in six bouts. He'll soon make the gentry cove's bones rattle in his skin like a dice-box at a country fair; it'll be confess, and be hanged, in the flourish of a cudgel. You war at 'size, landlord:—tell us how the prisoner looked?"

"Looked," said the host; "why he looked like a king more than a culprit. He walked into court as if he war going to try Judge, instead of having to be judged. He refused to make any further defence than that he was in-

nocent of every thing charged against him; gave the lie to the whole pack of us, (me amongst the rest) and demanded the trial by battle."

"So," said the Coventry man, "that's to be the upshot is it; and when do it come off?"

"On Wednesday next, didn't I tell you," returned the other, "they're to fight it out on the Green at Hill Moreton? There's a gibbet erected before the old manor house where this man's father resided, before he went abroad, and where he himself was born. A pleasant sight it 'll be for old Windblow, the miller, to look upon every morning from his parlour-window. What a strange thing that the old chap should have found the use of his legs, and got about in the way he has done; ain't it, landlord?"

"Ay, but there's stranger work than any thing you have spoken to-night," said the third stranger, who had sat listening with his head leaning upon the ample chimney-piece, without hitherto joining in the conversation. "There's stranger work, they say, up yonder at the Hall. They say that Mistress Dorothea Hubald is mad, and obliged to be close confined. Nay, there be some as say she's dead; at any rate, there's Squire d'Arbercourt, her father, and her brother come all the way from Cheshire to be

with her. They were obliged to clap a straight waistcoat upon her, I heard, a week ago. There's no servants like to stay there either, they do say, from the awful noises and shrieks heard all night long; they've had three new sets within the last three weeks since this business happened. It's a known fact that both old Hubald and his son walks. Nay, I know a man who could tell you more if he liked; for I believe he was discharged from the Hall for opening his mouth too wide on the subject. And there he sits."

"Nay, it's no such secret either," struck in the ostler; "for I know two or three folks as have seen young Stephen with their own eyes after dark, gliding about the avenue. For my part, I wouldn't go down it after sun-down, if you'd give me the estate for the walk. It's a fearful place that Murdake, according to all accounts; the avenue haunted, one says; the garden is bewitched, says another; round it the forester is afeard to venture alone into the woods; and now you tell us the house itself is haunted."

"Marry!" said the host, "it seems to be the devil's head-quarters. But come, Robin Marvel, let's hear what you have seen and known, for this howling night seems to me just fitted

for a ghost story ; is it really fact that there are queer sights at the Hall, eh ?”

“It’s true enough what Thomas Snail tells you,” said Marvel, “about the noises inside the building. What’s to be seen outside, as he’s often there labouring at his calling, and letting fly a shot amongst the deer after dark, he, no doubt, best knows. With regard to Mistress Dorothea being out of her mind, that’s *not* true, though it’s true enough that her maid is mad ; and true it is also that she’s in confinement, where nobody but Mistress Dorothea Hubald is allowed to see or attend on her ; indeed, some of the people at the Hall think she’s dead.”

“Good heavens !” said the niece, drawing closer to the fire, “how extraordinary ; what was it drove her mad ?”

“Why the very noises you’ve just heard tell of. I mind well the sounds on that night of horrors — the night after old Hubald and his son had been buried. We were sitting up late, we men, and all the maids had gone off to bed. The room where the bodies had lain was the best bed-room, where the old man died ; it is in the south wing of the building, not far from the kitchen where we sat. Mistress and Margaret had slept together

ever since master's death; we were all talking over the murder of Master Stephen, and taking an extra glass or two, for we'd been royally treated with liquor ever since it happened, when we heard a dreadful scuffling in master's room. The sounds were exactly as if five or six giants were struggling together; their feet trod the ground as if they had worn shoes of cast iron instead of Spanish leather, and each sole a ton in weight. The noise was so extraordinary, that we all looked more like ghosts ourselves than mortal men; we couldn't speak, we were afraid to move, and it seemed agony to sit still. O Lord! O Lord! I'm afeard now as I recollect it, 'twas so awful! After these horrible sounds had lasted about five minutes, as well as I could remember, we heard a heavy fall, and a noise like something choking, and then there rung out a dreadful cry: "help, Doll! help!" we heard as plain as if it had been sounded on a trumpet in master's own voice, same as when he lived; it seemed to pass all through the house."

"Well," said the host, drawing nearer to the fire, "I wouldn't have been there for more than I'll say or you believe. I fear me, there's been some queer work in yon place; I should be mortal glad to hear of its being set

fire to, and burned to the ground. Well, what happened next ; did you see him?"

"No, we didn't see him, though we thought he was coming in double quick time; for in about half a minute more we heard some one rushing and jumping down stairs, as if the devil was behind 'em; and next moment into the kitchen burst Margaret Bustlebig, my lady's maid, with her hair all flying behind her like a comet, her eyes starting from the sockets, and not a stitch of any thing on her body but her shift. She dashed into the midst of us, upset the table, and fell almost a-top o' the fire in a fit. Walter Arderne, who had looked whiter than any of us, and as if he meant to have a fit too, suddenly seemed to recover himself, and caught her up in his arms. The next minute mistress herself, with a candle in her hand and her dressing-gown on, but with neither shoes or stockings on her feet, came into the kitchen also. She seemed more frightened about the maid than any thing else. And, after awhile, persuaded Walter to help her up stairs again; I assisted also, and we laid her on mistress's bed, when after a time she came to. But, Lord help you! she was as mad as a March hare, and has been so ever since."

"There's more in it than we know of," said

the host ; " my word on't, but there's been some ugly work 'up yonder. Body o' me ! but I don't believe Sir Clinton Murdake is a bit deeper in the mess than some others I wot of."

"Then why did you go up before Major Illwill, and give evidence against him, uncle, in such a mortal hurry?" said his niece.

"What the devil would you have me do, ye graceless baggage ye?" returned the landlord. "Wasn't Walter Arderne here, fiery red with haste, knocking me up in the middle of the night, with tidings that Master Stephen Hubald had been found murdered in the avenue, and that the old man was dead at the Hall? And war'nt he here again by break o' day, accusing Sir Clinton Murdake of Master Stephen's murder, as clear as if he had seen him do the deed with his own eyes? Wasn't Stephen Hubald here courting yourself every night of his life, and only wanting you to fling yourself at him, ye stupid jade? Hadn't he more broad pieces in his purse than I could count 'twixt sunrise and sunset; and didn't this cavaliero, with his embroidered buff coat, his belts, his scarfs, and his bannerets, and horse trappings, and spit of a rapier—didn't he go from this very kitchen, and cut the young man's throat, and all my fine prospects? It was enough to provoke a man

to say what he thought about the matter; and no great matter either, when almost all I could say was, that I knew little or nothing."

"Nay," said the niece, "but then that little that you didn't know, added to the something the rest of you have put together and made evidence of, helped to get this poor gentleman into a pretty mess, and will hang him notwithstanding. As for me, I don't believe he's had more to do with the matter than you, or Walter Arderne, or any of us here."

"Go to, you're a fool," returned the host. "Because this gallant has an aquiline nose, a hawk's eye, as much hair upon his head and shoulders as would stuff half the cushions in my bar, and a step like a lion, you think he's innocent of any thing wicked. It's like all you trumpery female women, that."

"Ay," said the niece, "and because he's a nobleman, and as handsome looking, and nice behaved a gentleman, as ever I hoped to look upon, you are all so mortal angry and fearful he shouldn't be guilty of some horrid crime. Envy, uncle, sheer envy; you men are twice as envious of the good gifts of your sex as ours, for all your railing at us."

"Well, well," said the host, "let it be so. We'll drop this, niece, if you please; I tell you

I'm sorry now I said aught about him ; it's on my conscience since I saw him on his trial, he bore himself so meekly, and yet so bravely. Yet, they're nothing to me, these Murdakes ; they're almost forgotten in these parts now. It's hard too, I will say, to return to one's native land, as this youngster has done, and stand accused of such a fearful crime, if he really is innocent. Dang me if I don't think he was holding his peace to save others from death, after all. Well, Robin, let's know what more you have to tell us ; did you hear or see any more ?"

"Not on that night," said Robin Marvel ; "but the next night somewhere about the same hour, the very same thing happened again. There was the struggling, and scuffling, and the cry for help from master's room, just as before ; and no sooner did it begin, than the maid Margaret set up such a shrieking and screaming from the room where mistress had confined her, and where indeed, she was shut up with her at the time, that it was all we could do to keep from rushing out of the house and taking to the open fields."

"'Twere no wonder if you had," said the host ; "for my part I'm almost afraid as I listen, but come, the flaggon's empty, we'll e'en brew us ano-

ther cup for the nonce, whilst we listen to the finish of your story. Here, Dorcas, heap on more logs, girl, this heavy rain will drown the very fire upon the hearth; and Marian, do you fetch us t'other bottle, and warm us a comfortable nightcap, put in plenty of cloves and cinnamon. Now, Robin, here's to you in a cup of as good liquor as you'll find twixt this and Warwick. Let us have the finish of your story."

"The rest, perhaps, you partly know," said Marvel; "for, on the day after, several of the servants left the Hall, and more company arrived there that evening than were altogether welcome; Squire Hubald's kinsman came from London, and laid claim to right of possession."

"Ay," said the landlord, "they baited their horses here on that day, as they went up, and inquired the road; as ill-favoured and scurvy looking a set of companions as ever I beheld. There was the nephew of Master Hubald, who it seems claims to be his heir; he looked, methought, more like a deputy mop squeezer to an undertaker, than the owner of such a place as Murdake. They say however he's rich, and a slop-seller from Wapping; for the rest, they were a marvellously down-

looking company as ever my eyes rested upon, and I've seen some ugly customers occasionally too, at the Checquers."

"No doubt," said Robin, glancing at the man seated next the chimney-piece, who indeed was the most incorrigible poacher in the county; "no doubt you have. However, these worthies stopped at the Hall, almost at the same time Squire d'Arbercourt and his two sons and their servants arrived from Cheshire, for mistress had'nt been in any hurry to inform her friends of Squire Hubald's death. I promise you, Squire d'Arbercourt is as likely a looking man as you would wish to look upon, and his sons are two well-favoured youths. The old gentleman has a portly figure, with a jolly red round face, and a peaked beard; he stands full six feet two, if he's an inch, in height; he wore a loose hunting frock with a bugle by his side, and looked as though he knew what a hound or falcon was, as well as the best man in Warwickshire. Nay, for the matter of that, he had as handsome a hawk as ever I have seen upon his left hand, with silver bells and a crimson hood upon its head; I'll warrant him a sportsman tried, that man. We'll drink his health, landlord. I only wish he may gain the day, and settle at Murdake,

for we want a man of spirit there to keep the place alive."

"Here's to him," said the poacher; "though we don't want any more of your sporting squires in these parts; to my thinking, we've enough, and to spare already."

"What, you think, perhaps, he might keep a sharper falconer, than Walter Arderne? Well, you've had the woods at Murdake all to yourselves, you must allow of late, old chap."

"No blame to us either!" returned the other. "If Squire Hubald had no care for his hares and rabbits, and you fellows up at the Hall were too fond of your beds to turn out after dark, into the plantings, I know a company of jolly dogs who are nothing loth to look after them for you, and who like better to be brushing the dew off the fern by moonlight than to be snoring on the softest pillow in the country."

"Ay, ay!" said Robin, "Walter's a cunning chap; I know all about it. Well, as I was saying, the Squire and the others almost met at the head of the avenue, and rode up to the Hall, just like a couple of parties during the war time; for the Squire I believe was pretty busy among Rupert's headlong horsemen at Marston Moor, and the other lot were,

as you say, a mighty crop-eared looking company. Mistress came down and welcomed Squire d'Arbercourt and her brothers; and the other party, meanwhile, having walked into the house, quickly made themselves known by taking formal possession. Mistress was somewhat astonished, as you may suppose, and Squire d'Arbercourt was a little posed too; high words ensued, and he resolved that possession they should'nt have, so the house for the rest of the evening was in a state of siege. The Squire would have ejected them neck and crop, but mistress would'nt have it; so the Hubalds had one wing, and the d'Arbercourts the other. Mistress tried to speak 'em fair, and bid 'em welcome as guests, but this did not suit them, they said they had law on their side and right of possession; and, as Squire d'Arbercourt was evidently a better man at the tail of the pack, than when following up the quicks and quillits of the lawyer, whom they had brought down along with 'em from Wapping; I began to see we should'nt be long before cold iron would be called into play to settle the matter. The Hubalds had possession of the north wing of the building, and the Squire had the south wing, and there we were safe enough; for having the buttery and the kitchen on our side the house, we had

the best of 'em, and did'nt lack good cheer and plenty of liquor to keep us merry. They made one or two attempts to get at the pantry and the cellars; but we were too many for them, and held our own, and they were forced to let one of their party out of a window, and send into the village here, for wherewithal to keep 'em."

"Ay," said the landlord, "the fellow rode down here, and bought meat, bread, candles, and liquor; I saw him in the village."

"Well," resumed Robin, "we held our own as I said, for, of course, all us servants that remained in the Hall were on mistress's side, and the Squire got out plenty of liquor, placed his sentinels, and resolved to sit up all night in the great Hall, and make a 'rouse on't. Just about midnight, down came the crop-ears in a body, and in a twinkling a couple of dozen bright blades leapt from their scabbards, and the two parties, ranged on either side the Hall, were at it like lightning. The fray would doubtless have sent a few of us to our account; but almost before the weapons had clashed, and a dozen cuts and passes had been given and received, that cursed and awful noise commenced again in the master's room. Although the uproar of the combatants was

pretty great, for in the Hall some thirty men were lunging, thrusting, and parrying, that noise stopt the fray in an instant, and the whole party stood like statues listening to the sound. There were the heavy footfalls, like a plank beating the floor, the scuffling, scrambling, and the awful voice screaming all through the building. That horrible sound I shall never forget it if I live to a hundred. Walter Arderne, who I always thought had the stoutest heart of any man in Warwickshire, and feared neither man nor devil, swooned outright; the maids ran terrified into the Hall, and Mistress herself rushed down stairs as white as a sheet. Meanwhile, Squire d'Arbercourt and his sons recovered themselves, and calling upon us to follow them with lights, hastened up stairs in order to see the meaning of the noise. We searched all through the rooms above, but found nothing to explain the meaning of the uproar. The Squire and Mistress Dorothea were afterwards closeted for some hours, and the Hubalds were no longer opposed in taking possession. Some of us servants were discharged for saying we suspected there had been something wrong in the matter of the old man's death; and that's all I know of the affair. Since then, I believe, the Squire and his daughter and all their

party have left for London or Cheshire, and the place has been quieter; but I promise you I would'nt spend another night there for a year's wages in advance."

"It's a bad business altogether, Robin, I fear," said mine host, "and as you say, there's been foul play somewhere. Heaven's above us, and sooner or later we shall have the truth on't. I suppose you are all for the lists at Hill Moreton the day after to-morrow to see the combat. Well, it's an awful trial, and a disgraceful end for a man of quality; but, however, he's not the first man nor yet will be the last either, who has been hanged through a woman's intrigues; I say nothing, because I don't want to get into a mess; but if the women up yonder hav'nt had as much to do in that business as the poor gentleman, that's about to suffer, my name's not Civilbonnet."

CHAPTER X.

THE TRIAL BY DUEL.

Go, take hence that traitor from our sight,
For by his death, we do perceive his guilt.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE lists which had been erected for the trial by duel, were, as was mentioned by the discarded serving-man of the Hall, situate just beside the ruins of the old Manor House at Hill Moreton, and a gibbet also graced the spot.

The judges of the combat, the constabulary, and a strong body of men-at-arms from the towns of Coventry and Warwick, together with an immense concourse of spectators, drawn to the spot eager to witness the encounter, were early in attendance on the day appointed.

The spectators were for the most part of the lower order; for the circumstance of a man of quality meeting with even handed justice,

and being thus condemned for the crime imputed to him, was extremely satisfactory to the many-headed monster, and they hied to the scene with feelings of anticipated gratification.

Sir Clinton Murdake and the opponent on, whom he had rebutted the foul charge of the murder of Stephen Hubald, and had defied to mortal encounter, stood confronting each other as the clock in the tower of Hill Moreton church struck the hour of noon. They were both of them clad in leathern doublets, their arms and legs being without defence of any sort, and bare, their hair close cropped, and each was armed with a heavy oaken staff bound at either end with iron.

The young cuirassier, who in figure, face, and mien might have formed a study for the sculptor, stood on the green turf of the arena, with his ponderous weapon upon his shoulder, apparently unconcerned at the awful and deadly trial that awaited him; doubtless he felt the shame of the situation he was placed in, but the breastplate of an untainted heart gave him a threefold protection. He felt the truth of the great poet's words even in that awful moment; for his quarrel being just, his

look and bearing gave to the spectators the idea of one to whom fear was a feeling utterly unknown. After gazing around upon the assembled throng with a look of the most haughty and unqualified contempt, as some of the more ruffianly of the throng groaned, hooted, and called to him revilingly by name, he fixed his eye upon his antagonist with a steady gaze, and quietly waited the signal to commence hostilities.

Walter Arderne his opponent, a man of tremendous strength of limb and vast muscular power, stood a few paces from him. His great personal bravery; the skill he was known to possess in all rural games and exercises; and his dexterity in the very weapon he was now armed with; added to the supposed justice of his cause, constituted him the favourite, with the majority of the rude and easily prejudiced crowd. To many of the audience he was personally known, to almost all by reputation; for like Charles, the Duke's wrestler, he had seldom failed to break the bones of those strong fellows who at the fairs and wakes of the time, had entered into a trial of skill and strength with him.

Notwithstanding, however, the encouraging

cheer with which his entrance into the lists had been greeted by the assemblage around, his bearing was different, and was scarcely so confident as that of his opponent.

His great muscular strength and towering height, for he was considerably above six feet, gave him, it is true, the look of a Roman gladiator; but there was a lowering and crouching look also about him, and a restlessness and apparent nervousness, totally at variance with the cool and collected bearing of Sir Clinton Murdake. His brow was bent, his eyes sought the turf at his feet, he frequently shifted his position, scarcely seemed to bear the gaze of his adversary, but ever and anon darted a savage look at him, and like the tiger overawed by the eye of his keeper, he watched the withdrawal of his glance, that he might spring upon and tear him limb from limb.

Two distinguishing marks might have also been noted, as the combatants stood thus for a moment opposite to each other, equally characteristic of the men who bore them.

On the bare throat and sinewy arms of the soldier who had led on many a successful onslaught, and had more than once been left

amongst the slain in the stricken field, might be seen the scars of more than one gun shot, and several sabre wounds. The limbs of his more bulky opponent also bore ample testimony to the actions and deeds he had been most noted for the performance of, exhibiting the disgraceful mark of the branding-iron on his hand and arm for sheep-stealing in his early youth.

The barriers at either end of the lists having been closed, and the encroaching mob forced back by the mounted men-at-arms; all preliminaries also settled, and the crier having pronounced that no man should presume to attempt interruption or interference with the combatants, who were to work their worst and best upon each other's carcasses, "God defending the right;" the business of the day commenced. The word being given, the opponents stood at guard with their ponderous staves in an instant, whilst the hubbub and noise of the assemblage sank into the silence of the dead, saving and excepting the sounds of the rapid strokes of Master Wind-blow's mill-wheel close at hand, and the rush of the waters which turned it.

The falconer grasping his weapon with both hands, like a two-hand sword, at once dashed

upon his adversary, dealing him blows as swift as the strokes of the mill-wheel in the stream, as if intending at once to finish the combat by annihilating his antagonist.

Sir Clinton, who possessed immense strength of arm, and was skilled both in the rapier and broad-sword, held his weapon in one hand, leaving a small portion visible beneath his fist. He received the attack with the utmost coolness and caution, retreating as he parried and avoided the furious onset; ever and anon he severely checked the ferocity of the assault by a lunge so well given, as to hit his adversary more than once full in the face, and make him stop and shake his ears with rage and pain.

The falconer, indeed, became almost maddened, after having received two or three of these "counterchecks quarrelsome;" he had fought too wide to successfully parry these blows, and he now struck still more at random, but with such desperate fury, that Sir Clinton once or twice had his ponderous staff nearly beaten down upon his own head. Quite aware that the slightest mistake on his part, would be taken advantage of, and that his ferocious opponent would tear him to pieces like a bull dog if he could once strike him down, he kept

well away and bided his time. Had it been an encounter with the sword, he could have brought it to a close at any moment; but here he had an adversary before him like an infuriated bull who was well skilled in the weapon he fought with, and whose immense strength made it still dangerous for the Knihgt to assume the offensive towards his opponent. His object, therefore, was to retire and keep him at bay, whilst the evident wish of the falconer was, since he could neither hit his adversary or pen him in a corner, to rush within his weapon and get him fairly in his gripe.

Meanwhile the mob getting excited, and on their mettle as the exhibition proceeded, began to cheer the falconer on, advised him where to deliver his weapon, and vociferated their applause whenever he dealt a sufficiently swashing blow, getting their own pates occasionally well rapped by the staves of the constabulary for their pains. So that two or three minor fights were going on at the same time without the barrier.

At length the falconer became cooler and more weary in his efforts. He had received more than one tremendous punisher from the iron-bound weapon of his opponent, when

venturing too near in order to close. He was also getting somewhat thick-breathed from being so long the assailant. Sir Clinton accordingly seized the moment, and now stood well up to his adversary, who began to look a little cowed as the other assumed the offensive. The staves rattled furiously, and the falconer began to give ground in his turn; suddenly he seemed determined upon one grand effort, and by leaping upon the Knight, hoped either to cut him down, or seize upon him and hurl him to the earth. In this attempt he received a dreadful blow, which striking him full across his countenance, effectually stopped his further efforts. His motions after this salute were frightful to look on: he reeled and nearly fell, with both hands sawing the air above his head; then dropping his quarter-staff, he ran zig-zag towards the barrier at one end of the lists, and after staggering for a short time, fell on his face heavily beside the man-at-arms stationed there.

Sir Clinton might have followed up the advantage on his opponent before he reached the barrier, but he was too noble to avail himself of this. He dropped the end of his staff upon

the turf, and waited to see if the falconer should recover the effects of his blow sufficiently to renew the combat. When he saw him fall, he stepped up, and turning him upon his back, looked him in the face. A single glance sufficed to shew him that he had no longer any very formidable foe to encounter. The iron end of his staff had struck him with terrific effect across the mouth, dashing in all his teeth, and fracturing his jaw. He had also apparently received some injury on the brain, as he lay for some time without sense or motion.

The spectators, without the barrier, accordingly concluding their old champion was killed outright, began to give utterance to their disappointment in sundry deep-mouthed groans and yells against the victor; whilst those in attendance within the ring crowded about the prostrate body, and the hangman and his assistant claiming it as their own, endeavoured to raise and reanimate it.

After dashing water on the bleeding countenance of the vanquished, he began slowly to recover his senses, and staring wildly about him as consciousness returned, he attempted to regain his feet as soon as he saw his adversary

standing over him. The Knight, however, signing to the attendants to fall back, clapped his foot upon his breast, and heaving up his staff, forbade the motion.

"Make not the attempt," said he sternly, "or I will save the hangman's labour, and beat out your brains. From this spot you move not alive until you have unsaid the foul lie you have given utterance to, and cleared me from the stain of murder. That done, for me you are free as air."

"Take your foot from my breast," said the falconer with difficulty; "for God's sake, let me raise my head. O heaven! I am dying!"

"Confess your villany, then," returned the Knight, "clear your conscience, and make your peace with heaven."

"I confess all, every thing," mumbled the dying man. "Raise my head, for the love of heaven, or I shall be suffocated."

The Knight withdrew his foot from the prostrate falconer, and he was assisted into a sitting posture by the surrounding attendants, his swollen and bleeding face was then washed, and restoratives were administered, after which he confessed as well as he was able, that by his hand Stephen Hubald had fallen. Moreover (to the surprise of the Knight and his

auditors, he declared that he had assisted in the murder of old Hubald also some short time afterwards.

“He had been instigated,” he said, “to undertake one deed, and assist in the other, by his mistress, Dorothea Hubald, who, after some difficulty, had purchased his services for a considerable sum; and after he had waylaid and shot the son at the head of the avenue of Murdake Hall, he had aided his mistress and her maid to dispose of the old man. They had been admitted by Dorothea, as agreed on, while her husband slept soundly after the fatigue of his journey; and the two females having twisted a towel round his neck, he had thrown himself upon his master’s body and held him down. whilst they pulled from either side the bed and strangled him. The old gentleman,” he added, “had made a desperate effort to release himself, and having got his hands between his throat and the towel, gave them considerable trouble before they could dispatch him. Whilst so little did he suspect his wife of any participation in the act, that he shouted to her by name for assistance—‘ Help, Doll ! help !’ After the deed was fairly accomplished, he had stolen out, by his mistress’s directions, to reconnoitre the grounds; and suddenly en-

countering Sir Clinton Murdake there, had taken him at first for the apparition of his murdered master, and was nearly captured by the Knight; but, on the outcry of Dorothea for assistance, had made his escape."

CHAPTER XI.

Last scene of all
That ends this strange eventful history.

SHAKSPERE.

AT once, then, behold the hero of our story exonerated by the confession, of his adversary, from all participation in the dark deeds which thus unscrupulously perpetrated, had "left no rubs nor botches in the work."

Sir Clinton Murdake felt a bitter pang when he thus heard of the reckless atrocity and wickedness of the beautiful Dorothea. Notwithstanding his knowledge of her disposition, and his almost confirmed suspicions of her guilt, the narration could not fail to strike him with grief and horror. He was lost in a reverie, whilst his sometime foe, with all his sins upon his head, was being hurried to the foot of the

gallows where in a few moments the mutilated victim was seen dangling in the air.

The inconstant and wavering mob had mostly hurried after their former favourite, whom they now loaded with as many execrations as they had, before he was vanquished, received with encouraging cheers.

Sir Clinton was aroused from his reverie by some one touching his shoulder, and looking round, found Master Windblow beside him.

"God be praised for all his goodness," said the miller. "I knew well enough, Sir Clinton, how things would go. I told you at Warwick, your knave would be confounded in his villany. But, you do not well, Sir, to remain here. Yon ruffian had many friends amongst those shouting rascallions. Withdraw yourself into my house; your horse stands ready saddled in the paddock hard by. I have kept him for you during your confinement. Remove yourself to Stratford-upon-Avon, I will join you there this evening. Here is your purse too, as you gave it me. Farewell for the present."

"Thanks, good Windblow," said the Knight, "perhaps 'twere best so; be with me betimes at Stratford, since now I quit this neighbourhood and this land for ever."

The friends shook hands and separated ; and Sir Clinton following the miller's advice, retired from the lists, and after equipping himself in the miller's apartment, sprung upon his horse and pursued his way towards Stratford-upon-Avon.

Now that his own peril was over, the dreadful fate, which awaited Dorothea, weighed heavily upon his soul. Such was the effect produced on his mind by the beauty and fascinations of that unhappy and headstrong woman, that he still felt some compunctious visitings, when he reflected that, for his sake, she had dared and executed such fearful deeds.

Whilst these thoughts possessed him, the woods of Murdake came in view; ominous looking and dreary at this time of the year, the trees were without foliage, and the country around half under water, with the recent floods which had been prevalent that winter.

The waters being out, the road was impassable to the town of Wickford, and unconsciously Sir Clinton found himself once more traversing the park. Suddenly he resolved to ride to the Hall, and, by being beforehand with the officers of justice, he would be thus enabled to inform Dorothea of the confession of the

falconer, and give her a chance of effecting her escape.

The mansion, as he neared it, appeared deserted. The windows were mostly closed, and nobody was to be seen in its vicinity.

Jumping from his horse, he tried to gain admittance by the main entrance; all was fast, and the reverberation of his knocks for admittance, was all he could hear.

At length he remembered the key of the little postern which admitted him, on the night of the murder, into Dorothea's chamber. This he found in the pocket of his doublet. He traversed around to the rear of the building, opened the door, and ascending the stone steps, which were cut in the thickness of the wall, pushed aside the panel and admitted himself into the chamber.

It was so dark that he had to feel his way across the room, in order to find the window, to gain light, so that he might make his way to other parts of the house. Whilst doing so, he was nearly overpowered by a suffocating odour, which filled the apartment. - It seemed to him as if he had invaded a charnel-house.

On opening the window he observed that the dark curtains of the hearse-like bed were

nearly closed. He approached, and withdrawing them, started back with horror and disgust.

On the bed, where last he had beheld the murdered body of Old Hubald, he now saw the once lovely Dorothea. She was dead. From the state of decomposition of her body, it was evident that life had for some time departed from it.

The story is ended. No certain intelligence was ever afterwards obtained of Sir Clinton Murdake. An English gentleman, however, some years afterwards rose high in the service of a foreign power. He became the leader of armies, and the friend of a crowned head; and though he had achieved high-sounding titles, he was supposed to be this very man.

It is only necessary to add, that Margaret the maid, having escaped the custody of Dorothea, was apprehended in London, and was burned at the stake, near the Hermitage on Wolvey Heath, towards the side of Shiretown Lordship, where the country people, to this day, shew the place.

How Dorothea died, no one ever knew: she had quarrelled with her father and family in consequence of his entertaining suspicion of her

participation in her husband's murder, and had expelled him from Murdake.

The Hall itself, and the whole estate was for years the subject of repeated law-suits. It changed owners half-a-dozen times, and none ever prospered who attempted to reside within its walls.

THE END.

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